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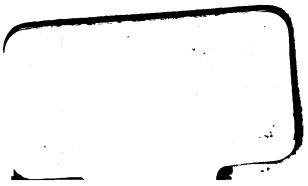

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CHERRY AND VIOLET.

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CHERRY AND VIOLET;

A Tale of the Great Plague.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL."

Anne Manning

As I sat by myself, I talked to myself,
And thus to myself said I.

FIFTH EDITION.

LONDON:
HALL & CO., 25, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1870.

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CHERRY *and* VIOLET.

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CHAPTER I.

THE REMINISCENCES OF MISTRESS CHERRY. — THE FIRE, AND DOUBLE TIDE.—MAL-CONVERSATION.

I WONDER whether many people, on reviewing their past lives, feel as I do on looking back on mine; that, had they had the ordering the outward circumstances connected with them beforehand, such as time, place, health, sickness, friends, acquaintances, and such-like conditions, they could not have arranged them half so well as they have been disposed for them. When I fall into a muse on the past, the moments fly so swiftly that I am lost in amazement when I find

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how the time has slipped by while thus pleasantly employed. And yet many of the arrangements which were made for me by a greater wisdom than mine, were such as at the time were far from agreeable to me; nay, were sometimes so repugnant to flesh and blood as to nourish rebellious thoughts, and call forth showers of tears. And still the process went on; as I now see, all for my good.

My father married my mother in the spring of the year 1632: being then in the prime of life, a personable, charming-looking man, though small of stature, and with a nose somewhat awry. In his conditions he was ever most lovely; of a sweet temper, shrewd observance, stout heart, and lively wit. Many, no doubt, had read more, by reason of their opportunities; but what few books he knew, he turned to profit, and perhaps no man concocted his reading into judgment better than he; by which he became so judicious and oracular, as that though he could not indeed prophesy, he could presage; and some of his presages came

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true, and others not, but might have done so had events taken but in a very slight degree a different course. He knew how to sound his customers, and suck the marrow of their knowledge, while keeping his own counsel; but this was his prudence, not pusillanimity, for I have heard it remarked by one who knew him well, that the Trojan horse was not more full of valour than he, for so small a man. Being a hair-dresser, this was not so evident in him as if he had been a soldier; but yet every man's life affords occasions, as my father's certainly did, of showing what is in him and what is not.

In dress his taste was excessive neat, and yet gaudy; so that on Sundays, when he appeared in what he called his marigold-and-poppy, with his hair—which men then wore very long—combed down in large smooth curls, his laced collar nicely ironed, his beaver well brushed, and his shoes shining like coals . . . it would have been difficult to find a grain of fault with him, save that, as my cousin Mark was wont to say, the colours

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of his suit did too much swear at one another. For my own part, I always had an impression that he was an excessive well-looking man, not out of any prejudice, but downright prepossession; and yet my dear mother, who I am sure loved him truly, always said to me when I alluded to the subject, "My dear, the qualities of his person were always far exceeded by those of his mind."

Of my cousin Mark, who was my father's apprentice, there could not be two opinions. He was winsome, lightsome, debonair; of most comely person and aspect: we were all very proud of him, and he of himself. If he had a fault, it was thinking too much of himself and too little of others; but this is so common that I do not know I am justified in particularising it. Also he was somewhat of a coward, not in respect of personal, animal courage, of which I suppose he had as much as the aforesaid Trojan horse, whatever that might be; but morally cowardly, as to what would be thought of him by others, and dreading the evil of the present moment, and so forth; which

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men don't think so bad a kind of cowardice as the other, but I do.

But his temper was most sweet, his manners most engaging. Oh! how much he came to be thought of, at length, all along the bridge! I have no other fault to find in him besides those already reckoned, unless it were a general want of principle, which was less apparent than it would have been had it not been covered rather than supplied by good feeling. But 'tis ill reckoning the faults of one's friends.

Of my mother, how shall I say enough? She was tall, slender, and comely to look upon, with sweet and quick grey eyes. She was naturally of a high spirit, which had been brought under a curb by Divine grace. She was kind and obliging to all, stirring and thrifty, yet not niggardly; soft-hearted to the poor, of wonderful propriety without the least priggishness, loved by her friends, and especially in her own family. Now I have counted up the whole house except our lodger Master Blower, and Dolly the cook.

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My father's shop was on the east side of London Bridge. Over his door hung his sign of "The Lock of Hair;" and over the shop-front was painted in yellow letters the following inscription:—

"PETER CURLING sells all sorts of Hair, Curled or Uncurled, Roses, Braids, Cauls, Ribbons, Weaving, Sewing-silk, Cards, and Blocks. Together with Combs, Crisping-pins, Perfumery, and all other Goods made use of by Tonsors and Hairdressers, at the Lowest Prices."

On the opposite side of the way was a vintner's, by the name of Abel, who had humorously set up *a bell* for his sign, and painted beneath it—"Quoth the wag, I am Abel."

Next door to us, on one side, lived a bookseller and stationer, named Benskin, whose sign was the Bible and Star; and next door to us, on the other side, was a glover, named Hugh Braidfoot, a jolly, good-tempered bachelor, black-haired, fresh-

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coloured, and six feet high, whose sign was the Roebuck.

A few weeks after my birth, which was in February, 1633, in the midst of a notable hard frost, there broke out a most dreadful fire at the north end of the bridge, which consumed all the houses on both sides, from St. Magnus' Church to the first open space on the bridge. There was, I have heard tell, much bodily hurt as well as destruction of property; many persons, in precipitating themselves from upper stories, getting their limbs broken. "Water! water!" was the cry, and all in vain, for though the Thames lay right under the houses, 'twas one great cake of ice, and the only resource was to break the conduit pipes that ran through the streets leading to the bridge, and sweep the water down with brooms, to supply the three engines that every one had thought would be such helps in time of need, but which proved very sorry helps indeed. In the midst of the tumult and danger, some neighbours of ours that were burned out of house and home,

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took refuge with us; to wit, the wife and infant daughter of Master Samuel Armytage, haberdasher of small wares; the infant being, like myself, a nursling of only a few weeks old. These homeless strangers did my mother hospitably and Christianly entertain, bestirring herself more in her care for them than in her tender case it was fit she should have done; and putting us two infants into one and the same cradle. With our little arms locked about one another, in an atmosphere of Christian love, 'twas no wonder that little Violet and I conceived a tenderness for each other, e'en while sucklings, that grew with our growth and strengthened with our strength. As for the elder parties, hospitality on the one side and thankfulness on the other caused a more than common friendliness to spring up between them from that time forth. And when the fugitives were re-established in their rebuilt houses, they long had an impressive and solemnifying remembrance of their narrow escape from an awful and terrible death.

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Now, though I cannot, of course, remember anything of the fire, I have a perfect recollection of the next notable occurrence among us—of the *double tide,* which happened in my eighth year; and how the river, after lying as still as a stone for more than an hour, suddenly came foaming up from Greenwich, roaring, boiling, and splashing to that degree that it was horror to look upon. And my father, after contemplating the prodigy along with all the rest, exclaimed, "Well, friends, you may say what you will; but I, though not a superstitious man, think something will come of it." And did not something come of it . . . or, at any rate, after it? and were not we, that had previously been sleeping on the still waters of a settled government, horribly overwhelmed with a tide of rebellion, anarchy, and republicanism?

The year before the double tide there had been much talk in my father's shop about the Earl of Strafford being given over to the Black Rod, which I, being of such tender years, could not well make out, but it seemed to carry an ill sound

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with it. After that, he was taken to his trial; and passed from his prison in the Tower to Westminster under our bridge. We looked forth of our windows, and discerned him plainly in one of the barges, guarded by soldiers with partizans; and there was much yelling and hooting as he went through the arch, which I for my part was sorry for, he was so handsome and personable a gentleman. The people, however, were much incensed against him; and, about three months after the double tide, there was what I may call a double tide of 'prentices and tumultuous citizens, to the number of about six thousand (my cousin, Mark Blenkinsop, being among them), who assembled themselves in an intimidating manner at Westminster, many of them armed with swords and staves, and demanded Lord Strafford's death of the peers as they went to the House.

I remember my father, for as small a man as he was, collaring Mark when he came back, and dealing him one or two blows, which made me begin to cry, and run in between them. And

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Mark, though a great tall lad of his years, began to whimper too, which reminds me again of the Trojan horse, and the valour that may dwell in a little body, and the pusillanimity that may be in a large one. And "sure, uncle," says Mark, "the earl deserves to die for his" . . . malconversation, or malministration, I forget which. And my father replied, "Never trouble your head with that. Leave the powers that be to settle their own affairs. Fine times, indeed, when barbers' 'prentices must be meddling in state politics! To his own master, the earl standeth or falleth."

Had all men been of my father's equable and temperate mind, we should not have fallen into the disorders we presently did; wherein, no doubt, there was much wrong on both sides. One night we were roused from sleep by cries in the street that "the king and his Papists were coming to fire the city and cut our throats in our beds;" but my father, after putting his head forth to learn the nature of the tumult, drew it in again

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and closed the window, allaying our somewhat ungoverned fears with that composure which it behoves every master of a family to assume, when he can, in seasons of danger or the apprehension of it.

Soon there was open war between king and Parliament, which went on increasing till the whole country was filled with bloodshed and confusion, and only ended in a total change of government. We were now in a state of fortification; for the Lords and Commons had directed that the whole city should be put in a state of defence, and that the Lord Mayor and citizens should trench, stop, and fortify all highways leading thereunto. Wherefore, all entrances into London, except five, were stoned and bricked up altogether; and those five were made as strong as could be, with breast-works and turnpikes, musket-proof. And all sheds and out-buildings outside London Wall, that were near enough to be advantageous to an enemy, were taken down; and this gave a great deal of work to do that

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behoved to be done quickly; wherefore even women and children helped the men in carrying earth, stones, &c., for by this time there was in the city a pretty general disaffection towards the king; and those that wished him well, and could not get to him, found it best to hold their peace.

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CHAPTER II.

CHERRY ENDEAVOURS TO REMEMBER IF SHE WERE PRETTY.—A WATER-PARTY.

AND now my memory flies on to the time when, I suppose, I was as happy a girl as any on the bridge. I know not whether I were pretty or not,—I rather suppose I was, but my father praised me too much, and my dear mother never praised me at all, so that I have no clue to what was really thought of me. There's an old saying, "Even a little beetle is a beauty in the eyes of its mother;"—I am bold to think that if I had been a little blackbeetle, I should still have been a beauty in the eyes of my father.

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My mother used to tell him "all his geese were swans," which was as much as to say that hers were not: be that as it may, if she praised me less, I always felt she loved me as much as he did; and I loved her to the full as much as I loved him.

I remember coming down-stairs one Sunday morning, dressed for church—(we had no Liturgy, nor Church of England clergymen then; such was the will of Parliament)—dressed in a primrose petticoat and grass-green mantua neatly bundled up behind, black mits without a crease in them for tightness, white pinners starched and crimped, and a small steeple-crowned hat—when Mark, meeting me at the stair-foot, stepped out of my way with a sliding bow, said, "Bless me, how pretty we are!" and looked attentively after me. I felt ashamed and yet elated; and thought somewhat more of myself and of him after that; yet I am not quite sure, now, that his speech was not ironical, after all.

Of my friend and schoolfellow, Violet Army-

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tage, there could not be two opinions. She was excessively pretty, and knew it too well: which was partly the fault of her father, who was always calling her his "sweet *Wi-let*;" and yet, even if he had not, I think she would have found it out, for all that. *My* father called me his rosy Cherry, but I knew it for his manner of speaking. But Violet always believed everything that was said in her praise. She was fond of me by fits and starts; and when the affectionate fit was on, she would bring her work and sit with me in the arbour at the top of our house, by the hour together. Sometimes my father and mother would join us there, in the long summer evenings, and we would sup in the open air; no one objecting to it but Dolly, who had to carry the things up so many pair of stairs.

At other times, when my father and mother were otherwise engaged, Mark would come up to us; and sit upon the roller or watering-pot, and say ever so many funny things to us both; which we thought very pleasant. Sometimes Violet

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would let her ball of thread roll through the rails and drop down into the street, and send him to fetch it; and when he had brought it she would do the same thing again; which he said was too bad, but I don't think he minded it. I never played him such tricks myself; for, what was singular, though we lived in the same house together, I was shyer of him than she was.

Our first floor was let to a very learned and excellent man, though a very singular one, the Reverend Nathanael Blower, who had been curate of St. Magnus till the form of religion changed. Then he was hard put to it, where to lay his head without fleeing the country or getting into trouble; for the Independents were mighty intolerant; and he whom we used to think it a great honour to get a passing word and a smile from, was now thankful to take up his rest among us. Holy Writ tells us that some have entertained angels unawares: if we entertained an angel, it was not unawares, though he was a very eccentric

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and untidy one. He said he would have called my mother the good Shunammite if it had not been a shame to provoke comparison between himself and the prophet Elijah. Indeed his was somewhat like the "chamber on the wall," for the back-room in which he slept was a lean-to that stuck against the main wall like a swallow's nest, and hung perilously over the foaming river, trembling at every half-ebb tide; but use inures us to everything, and he said he slept as well in his nest as a sailor in his hammock. As to his sitting-chamber, it was soon a perfect pig-sty (if pigs ever had books) of papers, parchments, books, pamphlets, old shoes, hats and coats, medicines, cordials, snuff-boxes, pipes, walking-sticks, and everything that is untidy. After a time he began to think whether he might not, by a conscientious conformity, be a working-bee rather than a drone in the hive; and having some acquaintance with Master John Howe, the Whitehall preacher, who was known to be forward in assisting the Royalists and Episcopalians in distress, if they were but men

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of merit, he went and took his advice on the subject before he presented himself before the Triers, that is to say, those who tried the ejected ministers whether they might be allowed to officiate again in public or not. Along with him went Doctor Fuller, so well known by his wise and witty books; who was generally upon the merry pin, for as pious a man as he was. He, presenting himself before Master Howe, said—

"Sir, you may observe I am a pretty corpulent man, and I am to go through a passage that is very strait. I beg you would be so kind as to give me a shove, and help me through!"

Master Howe smiled, and frankly debated the subject with him and Master Blower; and the end of it was, that when the Triers put it to Master Fuller whether he had ever had any experience of a work of grace upon his heart, he made answer, that he could appeal to the Searcher of hearts, that he made conscience of his very thoughts; and Master Blower said in other words what amounted to the same thing; howbeit, like

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Pharaoh's butler and baker, one was accepted—the other not.

And the reason was, that they got upon the question of particular faith, which was very prevalent in Oliver Cromwell's court, and put it to him whether he did not believe that all who asked for anything in faith would have it granted them, as well as have an assurance on the spot that it would be so. Which, he said, in that large, unqualified sense, he did not, for that he believed many timid believers had the faith of adherence who had not the faith of assurance; and that if prayer were made for some unreasonable thing, however fervently, he did not think it would be granted. That would not stand Master Blower; so he had to come back to his swallow's nest.

"But is it not an extraordinary thing, now," saith he to my mother, "that they should, except for the sake of catching a man in his talk, so hardly insist on the literal acceptance of a dogma which they themselves must know they overstrain? For would one of them dare to pray that

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his father or mother might come to life again in this present world, however much he might long to see them in the body? Or that all Jews, infidels, and heretics, might be converted this very moment, however desirable a thing it might be? We do the Word of God dishonour and make it of none effect when we interpret by the letter instead of the spirit."

In this fashion would the excellent Master Blower vouchsafe to converse with my mother in my hearing, much to her edification and mine. Meantime Violet Armytage was much more given to flirting than preaching; and had more admirers than any girl on the bridge; but the man whom she and her mother were chiefly desirous she should captivate was no admirer of hers at all. This was Hugh Braidfoot, the glover, who lived next door to us; and who talked the matter over with my father very freely when they had the shop to themselves; I sewing in the parlour behind.

"I can see quite plainly through the old lady," quoth he, as he sat on his favourite seat, the

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counter, with his feet easily reaching the floor. "I can see what she's driving at, and don't respect her for it a bit. Why should she always be buying gloves three or four sizes too small for her broad red hand, and then be sending Violet over to change them again and again till they fit? I've a dozen pair wasted that she has stretched. And where is the other daughter, and why is she always in the background?"

"Kitty is sickly and a little lame," says my father, "and has her health better in the country."

"I don't believe she's either sickly or lame," says Hugh Braidfoot, "only the mother wants to get this daughter off first—and stands in her own light by her manœuvres, I can tell her. Defend me from a managing mother!"

About this time, my father's trade had a short but surprising impetus, which, as he said to my mother, "was but the flaring up of a candle in the socket, just before it goes out." Cropped heads and long curls being now the signs of different

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parties, and the Roundheads having the uppermost, numerous persons that had hitherto been vain enough of their long and graceful tresses, which brought no small gain to the hair-dressers, were now anxious to be shorn as close as French poodles, for fear of getting into scrapes with the reigning power. And as, like the sheep after shearing, they left their fleeces behind them, which were in many cases exceeding valuable, my father and Mark were busied from morning to night, in washing, baking, and weaving beautiful sets of hair, which were carefully reserved for future occasions.

"For you will see," quoth my father, "there will sooner or later be a reaction; *I* may not live to see it, but you youngsters will. People will be tired of Puritanism and rebellion some of these days, and then the old state of things will come back; and the Croppies will be as ashamed of their stubble heads as the Cavaliers are of their lovelocks now; and, as hair won't grow as fast as green peas, they will then be constrained to wear wigs,

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and then will come a rare time for the barbers!" Every word of which, like so many other of his prophesyings and presages, in due season proved strictly true!

Meantime, though this fury for cropping filled the till as long as there was any long hair to cut off, yet, this being presently done, a great stagnation of business ensued; for, whereas the curled locks had required constant curling, brushing, and trimming, the round heads were easily kept short, and brought only pence where the others had brought shillings. My father kept his hair long to the last; and, to express his opinion of the times, so as e'en they who ran might read, he set up two waxen effigies in his window, not merely heads, but half lengths—the one representing an exceeding comely and handsome young man (very much like my cousin Mark), with long, fair tresses most beautifully crimped, falling over his Vandyke collar and black velvet coat: the other, with as red a nose as old Noll, close cropped, so as to show his large ears sticking out on each side.

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And to make the satire more pungent, the Roundhead made as though pointing to the Cavalier, with a small label superscribed, "See what I was!"—and the Cavalier, with a look of silent disgust, was signing at the Roundhead, and saying, "See what I shall be!"

This comicality, which had cost my father and Mark sundry hours of evening labour—(I had made the dresses)—drew crowds of people to the window, so as even to obstruct the passage along the bridge, and excited peals of ironical laughter; till, at length, mirth proceeding to mischief, blows began to ensue among those who favoured opposite sides. Then the bridgewardens came with constables and weapons to quell the disturbance, and an idle fellow was set in the cage, and another with long hair put in the stocks; and one or two of our panes of glass were broken; so that what began in sport ended much too seriously; and my father, finding he must yield to the times, changed the Cavalier's placard into "See what you had better be!" and finally removed it

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altogether, saying he was nauseated with time-serving. But he persisted in wearing his own long hair, come what would; which drew from the Reverend Master Blower that similitude about the Trojan horse, who, I suppose, persisted in wearing his mane and long tail after they had become types of a party. And when my father was called in question for it by one of the bridge-wardens, and asked why he persevered in troubling Israel, he with his usual spirit retorted upon him with, "How can a tonsor be expected to hold with a party that puts pence into his till instead of shillings?" Whereupon the bridgewarden called him a self-interested Demas, and said no more to him.

Hugh Braidfoot upheld him through thick and thin, laughing all the while; though he kept his own bushy head as short as a blacking-brush. Indeed, this man, though the essence of mirth and good-humour, strongly built, and six feet high, had not a quarter of my father's valour.

As for Master Blower, he made a wry face on

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it, saying that *Magnasheh miksheh* (which I afterwards heard was Hebrew for well-set hair) was now of no account.

—One evening,—I have good reason to remember it, the days being sultry and at their longest,—we made a pleasure-party to Greenwich, and took water below the bridge. Coming back, just as the moon was rising, a boat full of uproarious and half-intoxicated young men fell foul of us and upset us. I shall never forget my sensations as I went into the water!—The next minute, I was half out of it again, and found Mark's arm close round me, while with the other he struck out, and presently brought me ashore. My dear father also rescued my mother; and Hugh Braidfoot's long legs helped him more in wading out like a heron, I think, than his arms in swimming, for he, too, presently came aland, covered with mud. My mother and I cried, and felt very grateful to Mark, who stood panting and colouring, and looking very much pleased with himself; and presently we were all in another boat on our way

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to the bridge stairs, drenched, quiet, and thankful for our providential escape. . . . I, especially, feeling, oh! how happy!—Yet, in after days, there was a time when I was ready to wish Mark had left me in the river—.

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CHAPTER III.

RESULT OF THE WATER-PARTY.

THE only person in the boat, who was left for the boatman to save, was Mistress Glossop, the widow of a Cheapside hair-dresser in a much larger way of business than my father, with whom we were on very intimate terms. She was a woman of about forty-five, tall, bulky, and with a very heated face, which was the result of intemperance, not in drinking, but eating, as I have often heard her acknowledge. She was fond of everything nice, and had a habit of saying, "Oh, I can't resist this!" "I never can resist that!" which used to disgust me with her; and make me

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ready to say, "More shame for you if you cannot." She and her husband had always been well to do; and now she was mistress of a large business, with court-patronage, such as it was, and a foreman and three 'prentices under her; besides keeping a professed cook, housemaid, and scullion. And whereas she and Master Glossop had always been companions and gossips of my father and mother, whose ages were suitable to them, yet, now she had cast off her weeds, she went mighty fine; and Mark, who thought her sufficiently unagreeable, though he often went on errands to her, said he was sure she was casting about for a second. To a woman of her habit, the ducking she got was unlikely to be of much good; and as for her flame-coloured mantua, and pea-green mantle, they were ruined outright: however, she was very merry about it, and as we were all engaged to sup with her, would hear of no excuse. Howbeit, my mother was too wet for doing anything but going home and to bed: my father would not leave her; Hugh Braidfoot said

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he would join us, but did not; and the end was that Mark and I, when we had dressed ourselves afresh and kept our engagement, found nobody to meet us but some Cheapside shopkeepers who had not been on the water. And though they made very merry, and though there were lobsters, and pound-cake, and ducks, and green peas, and fried plum-pudding, and gooseberry pie, and other delicacies too numerous to mention, I had no mind to eat, but sat shivering, and scorching, and thinking of the water closing over me; and at length, before any one else was ready to leave, begged Mistress Glossop to let me wish her good-night.

Mark, though he was in high spirits, came away with me, and very kindly said he feared I was the worse for the accident. And though he had been very talkative at the supper-table, yet as soon as we got into the open air we became as quiet as two judges, and walked home scarcely speaking a word, till we came to that last one, "Good-night."

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I had taken cold, which, with a good deal of fever attending it, made me very poorly for some days; and my dear mother, who did not show it so much at first, had, in fact, taken her death-chill, though we knew it not till long afterwards. Meantime, she kept about; I seeming at first the worst of the two, and sitting by the fire in a cloak, very chilly, though 'twas close upon the dog-days. Violet Armytage came over the way to see me; and saith she, "Dear Cherry, how well Mark behaved! I shall think the better of him for it as long as I live!"

I felt I should do so too, but had no mind to speak much about it; and, my cold being heavy, and making me indisposed to talk, she soon went away. Almost daily, however, she came across; and, when she did not, Mark went at her desire to tell her how I was.

And so I got well; and just as I was fit for going out again, my dear mother's illness became so apparent that I kept wholly to the house. At first we thought it troublesome rather than dan-

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gerous, and were not frightened; and, though I sat by her bed almost all day long, she would sometimes send me down to work below and keep an eye to the house. Her illness subdued me a good deal; and Mark was becoming unwontedly gentle and silent; so that, though we scarce saw each other save at meals, we said little; and yet I never felt him to be better company.

Violet sent me word that unusual press of business in the shop kept her from coming over, but begged I would never let a day pass without sending her word how my mother was; which I did, though thinking, now and then, she might have just run over, if but for a minute.

One sultry evening, my mother, being ready to compose herself to sleep, bade me sit below till she rang for me, as she was sure the room must be warm and close. It was so, in fact, and I was feeling a little faint, therefore was glad to sit at the open casement of our parlour behind the shop. The business of the day was done; my father was gossiping with Hugh Braidfoot next door; there

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was a pleasing confusion of distant sounds from the city and along the water; boatmen calling "Yo, heave ho," and singing snatches of boat-songs; the water trembling and murmuring among the arches, and the evening air feeling soft and reviving.

While I was thus sitting, all alone save for Dolly in the kitchen, and Master Blower on the first story, Mark comes in and gives me a posy, saying, "Violet sends you these flowers:" and then remained, with his hand resting on the back of my chair.

I know not how long we thus remained, quite silent, and I conscious of great pleasure in his presence; till at last, for want of anything more important to say, I observed, "How pleasant the evening air is, coming over the water!"

"Very," said he, without seeming to be thinking much about it: and again we were both quiet.

"Cousin," said he at length, in a very gentle voice,—which was not his usual way of addressing me, for in common he called me Cherry.—

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—"Dear cousin, I have something to say to you"—and stopped.

"What is it, Mark?" said I, softly.

"We have lived long together," began he again, faintly laughing, "and I never felt afraid of speaking to you, before—How odd it is that I should feel so, now!"

"What have you to be afraid about?" said I, looking up at him: on which he coloured and looked away; and I did the same, without knowing why.

"You have always been my friend," resumed he, taking courage, "you will not be angry with me?"

"Why should I?" said I. "Is there anything to be angry about?"

"Perhaps you may think so," said he, "when you come to know all. Dear Cherry, I'm in love!" And laughed, and then was silent.

I never felt so perplexed what to say next. "I don't see that is any matter of mine," said I, at length.

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"Don't you, though? But that depends upon whom I'm in love with!" said he, smiling. "If it were with anybody a hundred miles off, that you had never seen or heard of, you might say it was no matter of yours; but, Cherry, she's not one mile off! She's the prettiest girl on the bridge!"

"Then," said I, turning scarlet as I spoke, "it must certainly be Violet Armytage!"

"It is!" cried he, rapturously; "what a guesser you are!—Dear Cherry!"

Oh, what a bound my heart gave! and then seemed to stop! For—I'm only speaking to myself! to myself I may own the truth—I had not thought he meant Violet.

"Ah," said he, after a long silence, which I was as unable as he was disinclined to break, "I dare say you've seen it all along—I may have told you no news—you are such a good secret-keeper, Cherry!"

I could not yet say a word—He had taken my hand and wrung it; and I gently pressed his in

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sign of sympathy; it was all I could do, but it was quite enough.

"How kind you are!" said he. "What do you think my uncle will say?"

"What do you think her father will say?" said I, faintly.

"We are not going to tell him just yet," returned he, "nor yet her mother."

"That sounds bad, Mark—"

"Nay, Cherry, you know how crazy the old lady is to have Braidfoot for her son-in-law; she'll find in time he won't come forward, and Violet will take care he shall not, for she will give him no encouragement; but, till her mother finds it won't do, there's no use in my speaking, for you know I have nothing to marry upon, yet."

"When shall you have?" said I.

"*When?*" repeated he, looking a little annoyed; "why, *some of these days*, as the saying is. You know I am thorough master of my business now, have served my time, receive good wages, and am very useful to your father. Who knows but that,

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as time goes on, he'll take me for a partner, and finally retire from business?"

"Ah, Mark, so little comes in now, that he will have nothing to retire upon. We can but just go on as we do."

"Well," said he, laughing, with a little embarrassment, "perhaps Mistress Glossop will take me into partnership. I'm a favourite in that quarter."

"Mistress Glossop! Oh, Mark!"

"Nay, Cherry, don't you see, if old Master Armytage takes a fancy to me, he may make it worth her while to do so, for the sake of his 'sweet Wi-let'?"

"Ah, Mark, Master Armytage is himself in a very small way of business—nothing at all to compare with Mistress Glossop's. We love and esteem them for old acquaintance sake, but she looks quite down upon them. There are so many small haberdashers on the bridge!"

"Well, the smaller he is, the less reason he will have to look down upon me. I suppose you

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don't mean to say, Cherry, that no young man thinks of marriage unless he is better off than I am?"

"So far from it, Mark, that I cannot see what right the Armytages have to expect a better match for their daughter; and therefore I think it a pity there should be any concealment."

"Marry come up!" cries he, "I would rather draw a double-tooth for a fiery dragon than tell Master Armytage I was suitor for his sweet Wi-let!"

"Why, you will have to tell him sooner or later," said I.

"Not . . . not if we wait till he dies," said Mark.

"*Dies!* Oh, Mark!"—

"It's ill reckoning on dead men's shoes, I own," said he, looking rather ashamed.

"It's unfeeling and indelicate in the highest degree," said I. "Why should not Violet tell her father?"

"Ah, Cherry, she will not; and what's more,

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she has made me solemnly promise that *I* will not, at present; so you see there's no more to be said. We must just go on, hoping and waiting, as many young couples have done before us; knowing that we love one another—and is not that, for a while at least, enough?"

I faintly said, "Yes."

"You don't speak so heartily, though, as I thought you would," said he. "Don't you sympathise with us, Cherry?"

I looked up at him with a smile, though my lip quivered, and said fervently, "Oh, yes!"

"That's right!" said he, gladly. "Now I shall feel that whether things go rough or smooth with me, you take cordial part in them. God bless you, Cherry! And if ever I'm in any little difficulty with Violet, I shall come to you for advice and help, rely upon it!—Hark, there is your mother's bell."

I ran off, glad to leave him; and found my mother coughing, and in want of some water. When she had recovered herself, and composed

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herself again to sleep, I sat by her casement looking out on the same scene I had been gazing on an hour before; but oh, with what different feelings!

The trouble of my soul taught me how much I had cared for him, what expectations I had nourished of him, what disappointment I felt in him. All was changed, all was shivered: never to be built up again! And yet no one knew what hopes were wrecked within me.—The world was going on just the same.

I thought how kind my father and mother had been to him, and how likely it was they had hoped he would marry me, and how certainly, in that case, my father would have shared his business with him.

I thought how dull and forlorn a place the world would now seem to me, but resolved they should never know it. I would go on, in all respects, just the same.

Large tears were flowing unrestrained down my cheeks, when Master Blower's bell, having

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been once rung already, was now pulled again with some impatience; and as Dolly had stepped out, I answered it myself, and found he wanted his supper, which he took at no particular time, but just whenever he was inclined to lay aside his reading or writing. I might have spread the table for him nineteen times out of twenty without his ever looking at me; however, on this occasion he happened to have nothing better to do, and observed I was in trouble.

"Child," said he, "is thy mother worse?"

"No, sir, I humbly thank you."

"Then," says he, "something else has happened to grieve thee, for thine eyes are red with weeping. What is it?"

But I could not tell him.

"Well," said he, after a pause, "young girls may have their griefs that they don't care to tell about.—Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward. And sometimes those griefs we show least we feel most. But remember, my good girl (for a good girl, Cherry, thou art!) that

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there is One to whom we may always carry our burthens: One who can ease them, too, either by giving us strength to bear them, or by removing them altogether — go pray, my child, go pray!"

And I did as he bade me, and found balm for a bleeding heart. He was a good and wise man, was Master Blower.

When my mother awoke, she said, "Cherry, I don't know what has come over me, but I feel a peace and a quiet past expressing . . . I should not wonder if you have been praying for me, my child."

I pressed her hand and said, "Yes, mother, I have . . . and for myself too."

"This illness of mine may be a blessing in disguise to us both," said she, after a pause—"it has taught me your value, Cherry."

"What a funny story," resumed she presently, quietly smiling, "might be written by a clever hand about a person who always fancied herself undervalued! 'The Undervalued Woman!'—

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There are a good many such in the world, I fancy; poor things! it seems no joke to *them.* People who have that impression of themselves generally take such silly methods to prevent their being overlooked! They had better make themselves of real importance, by being useful and thoughtful for others. They had better take pattern by *you,* Cherry!"

How dear a mother's praise! Especially when so seldom bestowed!

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CHAPTER IV.

CHELSEA BUNS.

VIOLET seemed afraid (and yet why should she be?) to come near me, after Mark's communication; and, as my dear mother could ill spare me, I kept close house. We now felt the blessing of having a discreet and godly minister for our inmate; for Master Blower read and prayed much with my mother, and comforted her greatly by his discoursings. I likewise derived benefit from the good seed he scattered, which fell, as it were, into ground much softened by heavy rain.

When I was able and inclined to step across to

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Violet, I found only Master Armytage in the shop; who said to me, with some shortness, "You will find my daughters within,—I wish your father would find something more profitable for your cousin to do than to be always in our parlour, a hindering of business."

I knew Mark was not there just then, at any rate, having left him at home; and, stepping into Master Armytage's back-room, I only found there a pale, gentle-looking girl, with large, brown eyes, diligently putting shop-marks to a box of new ribbons. I knew her for Kitty, though her return home was news to me; and, having not much to say to a stranger, I asked her how she liked the bridge. She said, "Not at all; I have been used to look upon trees and fields, and I miss the green; the noises make my head ache, and my mother keeps me so close to my work, that I pine for fresh air."

I said, "Sure there is enough of it blowing through that open window from the river!"

"Do you call it fresh?" said she, rather con-

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temptuously; "I do not, I can tell you! Instead of being scented with cows' breath and new-mown hay, it comes from tan-yards and butchers' shops."

When Violet came in, she blushed very red, but we only spoke of indifferent subjects; and, strange as it was of two such close intimates, we never, from that time forward, had any closer communication. Perhaps it was her fault, perhaps it was mine: or perhaps no fault of either, but a just and becoming sense of what was best for two modest girls in our new relation. For, though it needed not to be supposed that she knew anything of what was passing in my mind, I am persuaded that she did.

And thus the families fell apart; and Mark never renewed his confidences to me after that first evening; and, if he had moments of keen pleasure now and then, I am persuaded he had hours of pain he had never known before; for Violet was capricious and coquettish, and sometimes would vex him by being unreasonable and hard to please: at other times, by laying herself

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out to please others, as Master Braidfoot, and their lodger, Master Clarke. And though she gave out to Mark that this was only for a feint, to draw off the attention of her father and mother from himself, yet sometimes it was certainly with no other purpose than to plague him, and at other times, I fear, with no better purpose than to please herself; and I know it cost him many a tear.

Poor Mark! how my heart ached for him, and swelled against her, when I found him one evening with his arms on the table, and his head on his arms, and saw, when he looked up, that he had been crying. He rose, and looked out of window, and said, "Has it done raining yet? I think I have been asleep!" But I knew he had not.

All his money now went in fine clothes for himself, and presents for her; so that if he needed a little purse against his marriage-day, he was not going the way to fill it.

There was great talk among the young people,

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about this time, of an excursion up the river, to eat buns and drink whey at Chelsea. I was invited to join them, but declined, on account of my mother: but Mark was to go, and could think of nothing else. I washed and starched his collar and bands myself, and sewed a new lace on his hat. He wore a plain, silver-grey cloth suit, which was sober, but very becoming, for he never affected strong contrasts, like my father. Knowing he was fond of a flower in his button-hole, but was pressed for time to get one, I gave a little girl a penny to run down to the market for the best moss-rose she could buy; and gave it him myself. He thanked me most pleasantly for it, and looked so comely and cheerful, that when he went forth, I could not help standing just behind the window-blind, to look after him, and to see the gay party set out from Master Armytage's. First, a boy was sent forward, with a great basket full of veal-pies and other dainties; then came out Master Armytage, with Mistress Glossop, who had condescended to join the party, and wore a

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peach-blossom silk, with pea-green ribbons. Then, Mistress Armytage, with a little basket covered up, no doubt containing something very precious; and Hugh Braidfoot by himself, with his hands in his pockets, as if he expected to be asked to carry it, and did not mean to offer, walking a little in advance of her; then Violet, looking sweet! between Mark and Master Clarke—(I know she liked having two better than one, whatever might be her value for either)—and then Kitty, who by rights should have had one or other of them, slowly following with Master and Mistress Benskin. I observed her to be a very little lame, but nothing to speak of.

Well! the day was fine, the water looked lovely, there was nothing to prevent their having a most charming party of pleasure, unless it were their own fault. I thought of them many times, as I sat quietly weaving hair at my mother's bedside; and fancied them floating on the river, landing under tall trees, rambling among meadows, sitting on the grass, eating and drinking in

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the shade, and scattering in small parties. I fancied what I should do and feel if I were Violet, and how Mark would comport himself, and what he would say: but, when I looked on my mother's pain-worn face, I did not wish to change places.

They did not come home till very late; much too late. I had persuaded my father to go to bed, and let me sit up for Mark, for fear of disturbing my mother. He said Dolly might as well sit up too; however, she proved heavy to sleep, so I sent her to bed.

Then I sat at my window, which was over Master Blower's sitting-room, and looked out on the bridge. The harvest-moon, brightly shining, made our side of the way as light as day, but Master Armytage's side was in deep shade. I heard St. Magnus's clock, and St. Paul's, and St. Mary Overy's, strike eleven. Then I saw some dark figures coming along in the shade, and stop at Master Armytage's door, and knock up the maid, who, after long delay, came sleepily to the door with a candle. Then the others, who had

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been talking, but not much, like people who were very tired after too long a day's pleasure, said "Good-night;" and I saw Hugh Braidfoot shake hands with the girl on his arm, and step across to his own door in the broad moonshine. Master and Mistress Benskin had gone home before, and let themselves in with the house-key. I counted those that entered Master Armytage's, and only made out his own family. Mark had doubtless seen Mistress Glossop to her own door, as was right and fitting. For him, then, I must expect to wait a good while longer: and I *did* wait a good while; till all the clocks struck twelve. Just as they had done striking, I heard and knew his step, and opened the door without his knocking. "Have you had a pleasant day?" said I.

I looked at him as I spoke, and shall never forget his face!

—"Good-night," said he, shortly; "we'll talk it over to-morrow."

And impatiently took from my hands his candle, which I was trying to light for him at

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mine. But it had been snuffed too short, and would not light as readily as he wished; which made him curse it in a low, deep voice. I had never heard him swear before.

"Mark," said I, looking anxiously at him, "you are ill."

"No, I'm not," said he, abruptly; "good-night. Thank you for sitting up for me."

"I'm not at all tired," said I, "and there's some supper for you in the kitchen. Let us go there, and have a little chat over the pleasures of the day—you don't look sleepy."

From white he turned to deep red.

"The day has not been so pleasant as you suppose," said he, huskily; "you have been better and happier at your mother's bedside. I wish there were more such as you in the world. Good-night, dear, good Cherry!"

—And sprang up-stairs without another word, taking two steps at a time. I went to bed, but not to sleep; I could not get his strange look and manner out of my head.

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The next morning, at breakfast-time, Mark did not appear. Dolly said he had gone out early. My father was angry, and sent across the way for him, knowing he was but too often at Master Armytage's. But Dolly brought back word they had seen nothing of him. Then we concluded he had gone for an early walk, as was often his custom, and had outstayed his time. However, we breakfasted without him at length, and still he did not come back.

"Confound that boy!" said my patient father at last—(thus, the fault of one party provoked the sin of another,)—"it's plaguy tiresome of him to be playing truant this morning, of all days in the year, for I have pressing business in Eastcheap."

"Leave me in charge of the shop, father," said I, "my mother's cough is quiet, now she is dozing; and I shall hear her bell."

"Well, I suppose I must," said he, very reluctantly; "but I shall trounce Master Mark well for his conduct, when I see him next, he may rely upon it!"

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So he left me in charge; and my loved mother being in a kind of lethargic slumber, which often lasted many hours, I left the doors open between us, and sat in the shop. As fate would have it, not a single customer looked in the whole time my father was away; which was lucky, though we did not feel very thankful, in usual, for this falling-off in business. Before he returned, Mark came in, and beckoned me into the parlour.

"What is the matter?" said I, with a violently beating heart.

"I've done it!" said he, breathlessly.

"Done what?" said I.

"Married!" said he: and hid his face in his hands.

"Dear Mark, how imprudent!" I exclaimed, affectionately; "what will the Armytages say?"

"What will they, *indeed!*" repeated he, "Violet especially! She drove me to it!"

"Violet? *Drove* you to marry her?" I cried. —It sounded so strange!

"Oh, Cherry! what *will* you say?' It makes

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me shudder to tell you!" he rapidly said; "nothing but that girl's incorrigible coquetry could have made me break with her as I did; and then reproaches led to taunts, and taunts to threatenings, till bad led to worse, and she twitted me with my poverty, and I told her I could be a richer man in twenty-four hours than her father, and look down upon them all; and she dared me to it, and said a better man than me was waiting for her, and so—temptation to be revenged on her came in my way, and—I've married Mistress Glossop!"

"Oh, Mark!"

—"Nay, Cherry, don't give way so," said he, beginning to shed tears himself when he saw me weeping bitterly,—"love is not a man's whole life, and what I've tasted of it hasn't made me very happy—I've stepped into a famous business, and I shall have a quiet fire-side, and a capital table, and kind looks if not pretty ones, and —a done thing can't be undone: so there's an end on't!"

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Then, fancying he heard my father's step, though 'twas only Master Blower's, he hastily exclaimed, "You must tell my uncle—good bye, Cherry!" and hurried out of the house.

When he was gone, I sat in a kind of stupor. . . . *Married?* and to such a wife!—How *could* he?—how could *she?* . . . and this increased my amazement, for he had been beside himself with anger and jealousy, and hardly knew what he was doing,—but that she, cool, collected, and at her time of life, could have closed with his proposals without the delay of a single day!—how disgusting!—Ah, she was afraid of losing him!

Immersed in these sad thoughts, with my hands clasped on my lap, I was unaware of my father's return till he stood before me. I started.

"Has Mark returned?" cried he.

"He came back, and is again gone," said I.

"The young rascal!" exclaimed my father, very passionately, "what does he mean by this outrageous conduct? I've a great mind to lock the door against him when he comes back!"

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"Father, he will never come back!—he is married! . . . married to Mistress Glossop."

And, trying to speak composedly, all would not do; the tears rained from my eyes.

My father remained perfectly mute. I could understand his amazement, his vexation, by my own; accompanied, as I knew it must be in his case, by great anger. I expected every moment to hear some violent expression of indignation: he had been so unusually displeased with him already for what was comparatively a trifle.

All at once I found myself folded in his arms. He did not say a word; but the longer he held me, the more and more I felt that his hopes for me had been ruined as well as mine, that his schemes and visions of the future were all dispersed and overclouded, that he knew something of what was passing within me, and felt sympathy without having the power of expressing it.

"Well," said he, releasing me at last, and I saw that his eyes were wet, "man proposes, but God disposes. We've had an escape from

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this young man. Ungrateful young fellow! And blind to his own interest, too, for I could have done better for him, Cherry, than he knows of. But he deserves his fate. A miserable one it will be! He'll never prosper!"

"Oh, father! don't prophesy against him! We need not wish him ill."

"I don't wish him ill," returned he, "but he'll come to no good. He has done for himself in this marriage. And so, Cherry, you'll see!"

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CHAPTER V.

A SHADOW ON THE HOUSE.

OH how dreary now seemed the house! Its light and its life were gone. The unseen presence of love no longer gladdened it, and the shadow of death was slowly creeping on.

Violet came to pour out her wretchedness and her self-reproaches to me as soon as she heard what had happened. She declared she could never be happy again—she could never cease thinking of him. I told her it would be very wicked of her now to think of him, in the way she meant, any more. For saying which, I suppose she was offended at me; for she did not come near me again for a good while.

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I don't suppose tears are often shed over thick slices of bride-cake, with sugar and almonds an inch deep, such as Violet and I received (tied up with such vulgar white satin knots!) from Mistress Glossop, now, alas! Mistress Blenkinsop. When I took it up to my mother, she turned away her head, and said, with her gentle smile, "You may give my share to Dolly—perhaps she will like it to dream upon."

I said, "I don't believe Dolly will touch it;" however, there I was mistaken. She said, "Law, Mistress Cherry, I am sure mistress is very good. . . . I grudge the eating of it, too; for 'tis an unseemly match, I calls it; but, there,—one don't get such cake as this every day!"

When I repeated this saying to my mother, she said, "She belongs to the Glossop school, Cherry, that *never can forbear.*"

Mistress Blenkinsop would have been glad, I fancy, to show off her young husband on the bridge; but she received no encouragement; and as for Mark, who had certainly intended to pique

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Violet, he was now as wretched as herself, to judge from his looks, as reported to us by one or two who had seen something of what was going on. Happy or unhappy, he never came near us, on business or pleasure; and as my father dropped the connexion, which was more to his loss than Mistress Blenkinsop's, we now saw nothing of one another. For I scarce went out at all; but now and then Mistress Benskin would let fall how she had met the Blenkinsops going to such and such a place of public resort; he looking ashamed and tired of his companion; and she as fine as the rainbow. For she would not only see Funamble Turk, and pay her shilling to ride round Hyde Park, but intrude herself among the quality in Mulberry Garden, I warrant her!

About this time Master Armytage died. Thereby his family sustained great loss, not only of a kind husband and father, but of worldly goods; for the widow only got a third of the worth of the business, and the son, who was married and not very friendly with her, choosing to live

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on the premises, and carry on the concern, she and her daughters presently went into an exceeding small house in the Borough, where they opened a little shop that did not answer very well. After a while, Violet, unused to such scant living, was glad to come back as shopwoman to her brother, whose wife had no turn for business; but it went sore against her to be second in the house where she had hitherto been always treated like first; and also it was a grievance to her to live among a family of young children. These trials fretted her till they impaired her beauty, making her grow peevish and thin.

Meantime, her younger sister took plain-work when she could get it; and the Benskins and Hugh Braidfoot supplied her with what they could, which she accepted gratefully; though, in her father's life-time, it would have quite affronted Mistress Armytage that her girls should set a stitch for either of them. But times were altered now; she was unable even to keep a servant; and, one day, when I looked in upon her,

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I noticed so many little symptoms of poverty, that, on repeating them to my mother, she made me put up a variety of little presents for her, and take them to her with her old neighbour's love.

When I reached her house, I found her on her knees, scouring the door-step with such zeal and noise, that I could not at first make her hear my voice, or become sensible of my presence. When she did, she did not appear particularly glad to see me, but pulled her pail out of my way, and said, "Oh!—you'll find Kitty within—Kitty! Kitty!"

And just within the door, sure enough, was Kitty standing with her back to me, before Master Braidfoot, who was seated with a fringed glove in his hand, and holding forth to her very earnestly. He had sent her a box of gloves to fringe, and I suppose she had not trimmed them to his mind, for she was hanging her head, and looking very uncomfortable. As soon as he saw me, he brought his discourse to a finish by saying, "Of which,

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more anon;" and nodding a good-bye to me, stepped over Mistress Armytage's pail, and walked off. Mistress Armytage now came in, taking off her apron in a great bustle; and seemingly much more glad to see me than she had been just before. And she received my mother's presents in mighty good part, especially the brandy-cherries, which had been put in quite as an after-thought, saying they would make a pretty little dish for supper. I thought she and Kitty had been more in the way of bread-and-cheese suppers now, but made no comment. Some people would as soon die as not try to be thought genteel.

When I had nearly reached home, I saw Mark coming along the bridge in a hesitating, reluctant sort of way. When he saw me, he stepped out more briskly, and came up holding out his hand.

"Cherry," said he, lowering his voice, "my old lady and I had almost a tiff this morning, because she wanted you and my uncle to come and eat some of the first green peas of the season

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with us, and I told her I did not think you would. But, will you?"

"Thank you kindly," said I, "but my mother is so ill, we have no heart to go anywhere now."

"I knew it was so," said he, looking relieved, "but you will not think me unfeeling, I hope, for putting the question?"

"Oh no, I think it very kind of you," said I; "I take it as I know it was meant. Won't you come in? We have seen nothing of you for a long time."

"Thank you, not just now," said he, "good-bye." And walked off as if he were in a great hurry.

When I returned to my dear mother, she said, "Cherry, I'm sure you will be amused when I tell you what I have been dreaming about,—I dreamed you were married!"

I said, "Dear mother, if you take to dreaming, and my father to presaging, there'll be nothing left to be surprised about!"

"Ah, well," said she, gently smiling, "but this was a very pretty, pleasant dream—You were

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married to a person a good deal older than yourself, but very much to your own mind, notwithstanding, and were living like a lady, with everything genteel and comfortable about you."

I smiled to cover a sigh; and kissing her thin hand, said, "May you live, dear mother, to see it."

"No," said she, "I know I shall not do that—my time is growing very short now; but yet I shall leave you in peace, Cherry,—I am so certain of your doing well. I don't mean because of this foolish dream."

"As for doing well," said I, "God's blessing generally rests on the child of many prayers . . . but if by doing well, you mean marrying well, do you think that is the only way I can be happy?"

"No," said she, after a pause, "I do not. I think there is no other happiness equal to it, where the parties are well assorted, and are good to the core; but much depends upon each other, and much upon themselves; so much, that it had often been better for them they had never met."

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"And as so few *are* good to the core," said I, "perhaps the balance of happiness may not lie on the side you think."

"Perhaps not," said she, "but every one hopes to be the exception.—However," she added, after another pause, "these things are not of our ordering; and whatever be the happier lot, it is certain we cannot secure it unless it be appointed us, whether for ourselves or for those we dearly love. It may be God's will that you shall be Cherry Curling all your days, in spite of my dream, and in spite of your being fitted for happiness in another state; but that it is his purpose to make you happy *in yourself*, whatever you are, I feel as sure of as that I see you now."

When I told her what satisfaction the brandy-cherries had given, she smiled quietly, and said, "The same woman, still!—You shall take her some potted salmon to-morrow."

I did so; but did not, this time, find the widow cleaning her door-step. She had gone to market; the shop was empty, and I walked through it into

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the little parlour beyond. Here I again came upon Kitty and Hugh Braidfoot: she was sitting this time, and he standing, and, the moment she saw me, she snatched away her hand from him, which he was holding, and ran up-stairs. I felt very awkward, and was retreating without a word; but he, turning about upon me with a sort of homely, manly dignity, a mixture of placid and resolute in his manner that I never saw before, and which became him very well, held out his hand to me, and said, "You see, Cherry, how it is to be. There'll soon be a wedding in this house. The old lady has meant there should be, all along; but what though? Shall a man that knows his own mind be stayed from it for fear of playing into a managing woman's hands? Had the widow been less eager, the thing might have been sooner brought about; however, you and I have known her longer than yesterday—she's Kitty's mother; and enough's said!"

I wished him joy, and said I thought he and Kitty would be very happy together. Then,

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setting down my mother's little gift on the table, I turned to go away. "What's that?" said he. "Only a little potted salmon for Mistress Armytage," said I. "I'll call Kitty down," said he; and going to the stair-foot, he called "Kitty! Kitty!" but she did not answer; and giving me a knowing smile, he said, "I don't think she'll come down while we are both here"—"I'm going," said I, "but here comes Mistress Armytage from market." "Oh, then, I'm going too!" cried he, laughing and catching up his hat, "I've no mind to break the news to the widow, so come your ways, Cherry, we'll walk to the bridge together; don't look behind you." . . . "'Tis pity o' my life," continued he, smiling, when we had walked a little way together, "that respect her I cannot; for you see, Cherry, a man can never respect a woman whom he sees trying to draw him in! He may walk into her trap with his eyes open, and let her save him some trouble, but respect her or trust her, is out of his power. First, she wanted to have me for Violet: that

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would not do—then, Kitty was kept out of sight till she found I would not have the other; but as soon as she found I liked the youngest sister best, poor Violet was put in the shade, and Kitty's turn came. 'Tis ill to speak this way of one's mother-in-law elect; I hope she'll breed no trouble between us when she's mother-in-law in earnest; I should like to pension the old gentlewoman off, but that can't well be; so we must let her have the run of the house, and try to make her comfortable as long as she lets us be so."

Then, turning to a more agreeable subject, he sang Kitty's praises; and, reaching his own door, hoped she and I should be good neighbours. "Your father and you must come to the wedding-dinner," said he; "we may not have as many good things as the Blenkinsops had, but I fancy 'twill be a cheerfuller dinner."

When I told my mother the news, she took it very composedly, but I observed her eyelids give one little, involuntary movement, that betrayed more surprise than she was willing to show.

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"Ah, my dear mother," thought I, "another of your little castles in the air for me has been thrown down, I fear. This was, no doubt, the hero of the dream, who was to make me so comfortable! What a lucky thing that I care not a rush for him!" However, we never said a word to one another on the subject.

So the wedding took place, and my father and I were at the dinner, which consisted of every nicety that money could procure; for Mistress Armytage said that Hugh Braidfoot should have all his favourite dishes, and she took care to have her own, whether they corresponded or not. So there was roast pig, and pickled salmon, calf's head and green goose, lobster salad and marrow-bones, and more sweets than I ever saw out of a pastry-cook's shop. As some things were in season and others were not, the latter, though sweet in the mouth, were bitter in digestion; I mean, to Master Braidfoot, when he came to pay the bills. And then Mistress Armytage, ashamed of having exceeded becoming limits, went about

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to several of the tradesmen, who were Hugh Braidfoot's personal friends, and who already were displeased enough at not having been invited to the feast; and she incensed them the more by trying to get them to lower their bills, which they thought and called excessive mean. Thereby, Mistress Armytage got into bad odour, and Kitty came in for her share, and shed her first tears after marriage upon it, which I wish had been her last. However, Master Braidfoot laughed the matter off, in a jovial, careless sort of a way; and went round himself and paid every one in full, and made friends with them with a few merry sayings; so peace was restored, that time.

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CHAPTER VI.

METANOIA.

WHEN I see what a little way the solemnisation of matrimony in the Common Prayer Book lies from the burial-service for the dead (only separated by the order for the visitation of the sick), it makes me think how sometimes in actual life marriages and funerals seem to tread upon the heels of one another. Scarce were the bills for Master Braidfoot's wedding-dinner paid, when my dear mother, who had been fast but gently sinking, departed this life without a sigh. I had left her much as usual the night before; but in the morning was aware of a grey

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shadow over her face, unlike anything I had yet seen, and impossible to describe, that made me sensible of the presence of Death. My father supported her in his arms, Master Blower prayed aloud beside her, I bathed her face with vinegar, and Dolly ran for the doctor, but just as he crossed our threshold, she gently breathed her last.

How empty the house seemed! For, though a person may take no active part in its business, yet a sense of their *nearness* is accompanied by a constant feeling of companionship, such as I think we might feel with regard to our Heavenly Father if we would look into the fact of his being constantly about us a little more narrowly. Excellent Master Blower was a tower of strength to us under this bereavement; knowing how to comfort a man better than I could, and possessed of more calmness and composedness than I could be expected to have, though he said his heart bled for us all the while. But he set before us the blessedness of my mother in her glorified

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state so strongly, that it was impossible not to feel that our loss was her gain.

While the house was yet darkened, I heard a hushed voice, that had become strange to my ears of late, saying to my father in the next room, "I am sure, uncle, if you would look upon it as a mark of respect." . . . and my father, in tears, made answer to him, "I should, Mark, I should! I shall be glad for you to accompany us to the grave; for, indeed, my boy, she was very kindly affectioned towards you."

And then cried again; and, I think, Mark cried too. It was balm to my heart to think he was going to the funeral. An ill-advised deed had in the first instance banished him from us, and, in time, he had not only become reconciled to his banishment, but, from what I made out of the report of others, had learnt to rejoice in it. The first signal of a better frame was his *returning* to us, which cost him an effort, and then *repaid itself.* Master Blower called it *Metanoia,* whatever that meant.

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Violet was very kind to me. All her old affection for me now returned; and she would bring her work and sit with me for hours. Also the Benskins and Braidfoots were kind in their way, though after a homely fashion. But one that better understood comforting was nearer at hand. One evening, I heard Master Blower, as he met my father on the stairs, say, "Why, old friend, we have lived many a year under the same roof, and have never broken bread together yet! Bring Cherry with you, and sup with me to-night!"

My disconsolate father, being taken by surprise, had no power to refuse the honour: Dolly was sent for a crab, and we spent a very peaceful and pleasant evening together, not ended without prayer. As we left, the kind man said, "Well, friend, since you won't ask me, I'll ask myself to sup to-morrow night with *you*." And so he did; and many a rich and learned man might have envied us the discreet and pleasant guest that honoured our poor table. From that time, we thus spent two evenings together every week.

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By this time my friend Kitty had taken upon her all the importance of a well-to-do tradesman's wife, which fitted her as well as one of her husband's best pair of gloves. Instead of stuff and dimity, flowered chintz and even silk was now the wear! looped well up, too, to show the grass-green quilted petticoat and clocked stockings. Nothing, Master Braidfoot thought, was too good for her. And instead of its being "good husband," "honoured Master Braidfoot," so bashfully spoken, as at first, now it was, "dear Hugh," "sweet Hugh," or "Hugh" by itself alone. And happy, without cloud, would the lives of this worthy couple have been but for the hindrances of Mistress Armytage. Now it was her parsimony in something her son-in-law could well afford and desired to have; now her expensiveness in something for which she dared not give him the bill; and then he would find it out, and rate her, half in sport, and then she would take offence in right earnest. Then Kitty would cry, and then her mother would say she knew she was

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only in the way, and would go off for a while to her old quarters. When she got there, her tongue lay not still, like a good house-dog in its kennel, but must needs yap, yap, like a little terrier, that flies at every comer; and, to every neighbour along the Borough it was, "Oh, you know not what a Turk . . !"—"My poor, poor daughter!" —"Temper of an angel!"—"Will wear her out at last!"—"Never know a man before he's married!"—"Peace and poverty for my money." . . . and such like.

Meanwhile Hugh and Kitty were as merry as crickets in their own chimney-corner, little guessing or caring what an ill report of their fireside was spreading all along Southwark: and if Hugh met e'er a neighbour's wife that gave him a dark look, as much as to say, "Ah! for all your blithe face, I know what I know!"—all he did was to cry, "Neighbour, how do you do?" in a jovial voice that rang along the street. Thus the husband and wife would go on mighty comfortable by themselves till some favourite dish, per-

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haps, of Mistress Armytage's would be set on the table, and Kitty, with a tear in her eye, would say, "Poor dear mother is so fond of roast pig." "Set it down before the fire again, then," says Hugh, "while I run and fetch the old gentlewoman . . . I'll be back in five minutes." And, in about a quarter of an hour, sure enough, he would return with the widow on his arm, and there would be a little kissing and crying, and then all would sit down in high good-humour with one another, and things would go on quietly till Hugh and his mother-in-law quarrelled again.

About this time, dear good Master Blower, who had hitherto led a removed life among us, hidden and yet known, ministering and being ministered unto by many of his old flock on the sly, did by some indiscretion or misadventure provoke the notice of the powers then riding paramount; and coming home to us in great perturbation one day, told us he must at once take ship to Holland in a vessel going down the river

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the next morning. This was greatly to the sorrow of my father and myself; and some tears of mine fell on his little packet of clean linen as I made it up for him; and I thought it no wrong to slip into the easy slippers I knew he would not fail to take out at the journey's end, a little purse with seven gold caroluses in it, that I had long been hoarding for some good use. The wind was light, but yet fair: there was a remedy against sea-sickness in my father's shop-window, that I had not much faith in, it had lain so long in the sun, even supposing there ever were any virtue in it; however, I thought there could be no harm in just sewing it in the lining of his coat, according to the directions printed . . . at least, so I thought at the time, but afterwards I observed I had made a mistake, but it did no harm if no good. And father gave him a bottle of Cognac brandy, which really *had* some virtue in it; so we did for him what we could, one way or another. And he packed up what few papers he could carry, and burned others, and locked up the rest,

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leaving them and his books in my charge, with his blessing. And so the good man went.

Often afterwards, when I was setting his rooms in order, and dusting his books, I would stand with my duster in my hand, looking at the table at which he used to write, and the old arm-chair in which he used to sit, and fall into a kind of muse, till I almost seemed to see his large, quiet, brown eyes, that were set so far under the shadow of his brows, and seemed lighted up, somehow, from within, looking up at me, and his pleasant face smiling at me (he had a very sweet smile, had Master Blower), and his pleasant voice saying, "Well, Cherry, is it eating-time again, already?"

Now and then I would open one or other of his books, and, if I chanced upon anything I understood and that interested me, would stand reading on and on, till I was startled by hearing my father call for me. At length, he knew where to look for me; and took to laughing at me for taking such a turn for study; but one

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day he fell to reading one of Master Blower's books himself, and liked it so well, that, we being but quiet companions for one another, now there was so little to say, we spent many an hour, sitting over-against each other, each with our book.

One day, as I sat sewing in the parlour, and my father was cutting a man's hair, I heard his customer say, "My Lord Protector's very ill, and like to die."

"Don't believe it," said my father, "*he'll* never die in his bed." Which, for once, was a presage that did not come true.

"Well, he seems to think so too," said the other; "at all events, he's having thanks put up for his recovery, while yet he's as bad as can be; which looks premature."

"That's the faith of *assurance*, I call it," said my father, dryly, "Well, now, what may be the matter with his Grace?—a pain in his heart, or his head, or what?"

"A tertian fever, they say," returned his com-

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panion; "you know his favourite daughter died scarce a month back, and, in her last moments, she told him many a thing that no one had had courage to tell him before, and expostulated with him on his ways, and charged him with slaying the Lord's anointed; which, 'tis thought, he took so much to heart as that his troubled mind invited if it did not occasion this illness."

"Well," said my father, "I'd rather be the dead King than the dying Protector. What has become now of all his trust in the Lord, and inward assurance? Does the grandeur he has earned with so much guilt smooth his sick pillow? Is the death he so boldly confronted on the battle-field quite so easy to face, now he lies quiet and watchful all night, with his silk curtains drawn about him? Does he feel as secure of being one of the elect, unable to fall into final reprobation, as when he was fighting his way up to a dead man's chair? Ah, Sir, we may ask one another these questions, but our own hearts must give their only answer."

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In fact, Oliver Cromwell presently breathed his last, amidst a tempest of wind and rain that seemed a type of his own tempestuous character. And in his place was set up one that did not fill it: his quiet and peaceable son, Richard, who had gone on his knees to his father to pray that the king's head might not be cut off. He was gentle, generous, and humane; but those were no recommendations in the eyes of the army or parliament, so he was presently set aside. Whereon ensued such squabblings and heart-burnings, I was glad I was not a man.

One day, Mark came in, all flushed and eager, looking like his old self; and "Uncle!" says he, "there's a brave time coming again for hair-dressers! It's my fancy, wigs will presently be in (for Cavalier curls won't grow in a night), and then you'll have a market for that lot of hair that you and I put so carefully aside."

"How so, Mark?" says my father.

"Why," says Mark, "honest George Monk, as the soldiers call him, is marching up to London,

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and you have always said he was a Royalist in his heart."

"Heaven defend us from siege and civil war," says father; "we've had too much of them already. Better one master than many, even such a master as old Noll; and if General Monk is coming up to seat himself in his place, 'twill be better for us than these city tumults, wherein a parcel of young 'prentices that deserve a good threshing, get together and clamour for things they know not, till grown men are forced to put them down with a strong hand. *Where there's order there's liberty;* and nowhere else."

Mark's news proved true; the disaffected regiments were sent out of London, and General Monk with his army entered Westminster. He was a right-judging as well as right-meaning man on the whole, to my mind; prudent and moderate, though he sided first with one party, then with the other, then back to the first again. One of the evil consequences of our evil times was, so many conscientious men were set down

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for obstinate and pig-headed, or else turncoats. My father, to represent the humour of the time, had removed the obnoxious Cavalier and Puritan from his window, and set up in their stead a head that united half of both, which, revolving slowly when he pulled a string, showed now one side, now the other, and, as he observed, never looked so bad as when you saw a little of both. But as soon as Monk, throwing off his late show of moderation, marched into the city, removed the posts and chains across the streets, seized on obnoxious persons, and broke down our gates and portcullises, my father became sure that a great change was at hand, and the king would enjoy his own again. Whereon, he commenced beautifying and renewing the waxen Cavalier, which had got a little fly-spitten, and privately smuggled into the house a most beautiful female counterpart for it, extremely like Queen Henrietta Maria, whom I immediately set about dressing in the favourite style of her Majesty, that is to say, in a rich velvet boddice, with a falling collar of cut-

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work, vandyked at the edge, relieved by a blue breast-knot. My father dressed her hair in long, drooping, dark curls, with a few pearl pins; and, abiding the right time with calmness and confidence, shut up the comely pair in a dark closet till the happy moment for their bursting upon the world should arrive.

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CHAPTER VII.

SIGNS IN THE AIR.

AND now the glorious Restoration at length arrived, and 'tis incredible what a spur it was to trade, and how the mercers and drapers could hardly supply their customers fast enough with expensive goods; and how the tailors and sempstresses worked all night, and hairdressers sold their ell-wigs, and hatters their hats, and horse-dealers their horses, good and bad. For every one was for pouring out of London, across our bridge, at least as far as Blackheath. Oh, what a busy, what a joyous sight it was! All the streets from the bridge to Whitehall were hung with tapestry,

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and the windows filled with ladies. The Lord Mayor's cooks set up a gay tent in St. George's Fields, to prepare a refection for his Majesty. The livery companies, in their various rich dresses of crimson, violet, purple, and scarlet, lined the streets on one side, and the trained bands on the other: bursts of gay music were intermingled with cheers and laughter; everybody seemed in tip-top spirits that the king was coming. We let our windows for a good premium to some of the grandees; but had a good view ourselves of what was going on from the leads—now there would come along a troop of two or three hundred or more, in cloth of silver doublets; then four or five times as many in velvet coats, with attendants in purple; then another party in buff coats with cloth of silver sleeves and green scarfs, others in pale blue and silver, others in scarlet; by-and-by, six hundred of the livery on horseback, in black velvet with gold chains; then the trumpeters, waits, city officers, sheriffs, and Lord Mayor . . . in short, there was no end to the splendour and

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glory of that day; for we had hardly rested ourselves after seeing them all go forth, when they began to come back, with the king in the midst. Oh, what shouts! what cheers! what bursts of music! And he, bowing this side and that, so smiling and gracious! "It seemed," he said, "as if it must have been his own fault he came not sooner back, every one appeared so glad to see him!"

But the ladies' dresses!—Oh, how grieved I was!—Sure, they were resolved to make up for the dulness and decorum they had been restricted to during the Protectorate; for, indeed, they seemed to think decorum and dulness went together, and should now be thrown overboard in company. The Henrietta Maria dress I had so complacently made up for our wax doll was now twenty years behind the fashion! fit only to laugh at!—and what had taken its place, I thought fit only to blush at.

For a moment, when the party that had hired our first-floor window had thrown off their cloaks,

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I felt a dreadful presentiment that their characters could not be over good; or else, thought I, they never could dress in such a manner. Only, knowing who they were, I thought again, *that* can never be—dear heart! what can they be thinking of? we shall have stones and mud thrown up at the window. "Sure, madam," said I to the youngest and prettiest, "you will catch cold at the open window . . . the wind blows in very fresh from the river—will you just have this scarf a little over your shoulders?" "No, thank you," says she, shaking back quite a bush of fair hair, and looking up at me with her eyes half shut, as if she were sleepy already. "Forsooth," thought I, "those curls are equal to a fur tippet" —And, looking across at our neighbours' windows, I saw we need not fear pelting, for that all the other ladies were dressed just the same. Then thought I, Oh, this is the Restoration, is it? If you, fair ladies, provoke ill thoughts of you, you must not feel aggrieved if people think not of you very well.

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I disliked this symptom of the Restoration from the very first—not that it had, naturally, any connection with it.—The king had lived long abroad, had become fond of foreign fashions; but were the modest ladies of England, therefore, to give in to them? Then, what the upper classes affect, the lower classes soon ape: I knew we should presently have Mistress Blenkinsop and Violet trying which could wear the longest curls and shortest petticoats, and look the most languishing. The only difference would be, that the one would become the fashion, and the other make it ridiculous. Perhaps, thought I, I am growing prudish and old-maidish, I am eight and twenty; but so is Violet.

I have often thought, that if the ladies of England had at this time been what they ought, a good deal of folly and sin that presently stained this reign would never have happened. What! could the merry glance and free word of a light young monarch break down barriers that were not tottering already? What had mothers

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and teachers been about? Where were the Lady Fanshawes and Lucy Hutchinsons? There must have been something wrong in the bringing-up—I can never believe all these fair young ladies were so good one day and so bad the next.

But the joyfullest event, to ourselves, on that glorious twenty-ninth of May, was the restoration to his country and home of our excellent friend and lodger, Master Blower. He seemed to be rejuvenised by the general spirit of hilariousness; for I protest it seemed as though ten years were taken off his shoulders. And he talked of being soon replaced in his curacy; but, instead of that, his friends presently got him a living in the city, which took him away from us, as there was a parsonage house. But we went to his church on Sundays; and, as he was not one of those who forget old friends or humble ones, he would make my father and me sup with him about once a quarter, and come to us of his own accord about as often, and talk over the times, which in some respects, as far as sabbath-keeping and

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general morality went, we could not say were bettered.

And now a shocking sight was to be seen at the bridge gate,—the heads, namely, of those traitors who brought about the death of the late king, and who richly deserved their bad end. There they have remained for many a year, a terror to all evil-doers.

It was in the spring following the Restoration, in the month of March, that we and the Braidfoots were taking our supper together on the leads, the weather being very warm for the season, when our attention was attracted by the uncommon appearance of the clouds, which, as will often be the case after much rain, were exceeding gorgeous and grotesque. Master Braidfoot was the first of us who noticed them, and cried, "See, see, neighbours! Cannot you now credit how lovers of the marvellous have oft-times set tales afloat of armies seen fighting in the air? Do not those two battalions of clouds, impelled by opposite currents, look like two great

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armies with spears and banners, about to encounter each other? Now they meet, now they fall together, now one vanishes away! Now, they both are gone!"

"And see, dear Hugh," cries Kitty, "there's another that looks like a cathedral; and another like an exceeding big mountain, with a rent in its side; and out of the rent comes something that looks like a crocodile, with its jaws wide open no! now it is liker to a bull, or rather to a lion."

"Very like a whale!" said a man, as if to himself, on the top of the next house. It was Master Benskin's lodger, who wrote for the booksellers.

Kitty started, and lowered her voice; for we were not on speaking terms with him; however, she squeezed my arm and said softly, "It really *is* becoming something like a whale now, though!" On which, Master Braidfoot burst into one of his ringing laughs, and cried, "Why, Kitty, you give it as many faces as the moon! What will you fancy it next?"

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"I wonder what it means," says she, very gravely.

"Means?" said her husband, still laughing, "why, it means we shall have some more wet weather. So we'll put off our pleasure party. See what a red flame the setting sun casts all along the city!"

About a week after this, our neighbour, Master Benskin, gave my father a little pamphlet of four leaves, writ by his lodger; the title of which was truly tremendous. It was this:—

"Strange News from the West! being a true and perfect Account of several Miraculous Sights seen in the Air westward, on Thursday last, by divers Persons of Credit, standing on London Bridge between Seven and Eight of the Clock. Two great Armies marching forth of two Clouds, and encountering each other; but, after a sharp Dispute, they suddenly vanished. Also, some remarkable Sights that were seen to issue forth of a Cloud that

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seemed like a Mountain, in the Shapes of a Bull, a Bear, a Lyon, and an Elephant with a Castle on his Back; and the manner how they all vanished."

"Well," said my father, turning the leaf, "is it dedicated to Mistress Braidfoot? Here seems to be much ado about nothing, I think."

"Nothing or something," said Master Benskin, laughing, and jingling his pockets, "it has enabled my lodger to pay up seven weeks' arrears; so it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. The trifle has had a run, sir!"

"So this is the way books are made, and stories are vamped up," said my father. "Truly, it makes one serious."

But a little time after, a rumour was repeated in the shop that did indeed make one serious; to wit, that the plague was in Holland, and would very likely come across to us. However, though the following year it did indeed rage very badly in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, yet it crossed not

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the water for another twelve months or more; and as we had no such things as printed newspapers in those days, such as I have lived to see since, reports did not instantly spread over the whole nation as they do now.

Howbeit, at the latter end of November, 1664, there really were two cases of plague in Long Acre, which frightened people a good deal. A third man afterwards died of the same distemper in the same house, which kept alive our uneasiness; but after that, nothing was heard of it for six weeks or more, when it broke out beyond concealment.

At this time, Master Benskin's shop-window was full of small books with awakening titles, such as "Britain's Remembrancer,"—"Come out of her, my People,"—"Give Ear, ye careless Daughters," and such-like, many of them emanating from the pen of his lodger in the attic; and with these and Lilly's Almanacs, he drove a thriving trade.

Violet was sitting with me one morning, when

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Mark suddenly entered, and seeing her with me, lost his presence of mind directly, and forgot what he had to say. She on her part, being just then in mourning for one of her brother's children, for whom I am bold to say she had scarce shed a tear (he being a humorsome child, particularly disagreeable to her), fetches a deep sigh, and with a pretty, pensive air takes up her work, rises, mutely curtsies to him, and retires. On which he, after a minute's silence, says sadly, "Violet is as beautiful, I see, as ever,"—and I was grieved to find he still thought so much about her.

Just then, my father enters; and Mark of a sudden recollecting his business, exclaimed, "Oh, Uncle, here is a capital opening for you. 'Tis an ill wind, sure enough, that blows nobody any good,—I don't know why you should not do a good turn of business as well as ourselves by being agent for the sale of these patent nostrums" . . . and thereon pulled out a parcel of bills, headed "Infallible Preventive-pills against the Plague."

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. . . "Never-failing Preservatives against Infection." . . . "Sovereign Cordials against the Corruption of the Air." . . . "The Royal Antidote—" and so forth.

—"No, boy, no," said my father, putting them by, one after another, as he looked over them; "time was when I should have thought it as innocent to laugh in my sleeve at other people's credulity and turn a penny by their delusions as yourself, and many others that are counted honest men; but I'm older and sadder now. To the best of my belief, every and all of these remedies are counterfeits, that will not only rob people of their money, but peradventure of their lives by inducing them to trust in what they have bought instead of going to the expense of proper medicines. A solemn time is coming; my own time may be short; and whether I be taken or whether I be left, God forbid I should carry a lie in my right hand, or set it in my shop-window."

A customer here summoned him away; and Mark, instead of departing, sat down beside me

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and said, "What think you, Cherry, of this approaching visitation? Are you very much affrighted?"

"Awe-stricken, rather," I made answer; "I only fear for myself along with the rest, and I fear most for my father, who will be more exposed to it than I shall; but I feel I can leave the matter in God's hand."

"I wish I could," said poor Mark, sighing. "I own to you, Cherry, I am horribly dismayed. I have a presentiment that I shall not escape. My wife," continued he, with great bitterness in his tone . . . . he commonly spoke of her with assumed recklessness as "his old lady" . . . "my wife has no sense of the danger—mocks at it, defies it; refuses to leave her house and her business, come what may, and tells me with a scoff I shall frighten myself to death, and that Ralph Denzel shall be her third.—Don't you hate, Cherry, to hear husbands and wives, even in sport, making light of each other's deaths?"

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Her grossness was offensive to me, and I said in a low voice, "I do."

"And if I die, as die I very likely shall," pursued he, hurriedly, "you may do me a kindness, Cherry, by telling Violet that I never—"

This was insupportable to me. "Dear Mark," I cried, "why yield to this notion of evil which may be its own fulfilment? God watches over all. With proper precaution, and with his blessing, we may escape. No one knows his hour: the brittle cup oft lasts the longest.—Many a casualty may cut us off before the day of general visitation."

"Aye," he replied, with a sickened look, "but I had a dream last night . . . and, just now, as I came through Bishopgate churchyard, a crowd of people were watching a ghost among the tombs, that was signing to houses that should be stricken, and to yet undug graves."

"*Watching* it?" said I. "Did you see it?"

"Well, I rather think I did," said Mark, "but am not quite assured—the press was very great.

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At any rate, I saw those who evidently *did* see it. My wife has had her fortune told, and the fortune-teller avouched to her she should escape; so there's the ground of *her* comfort. To make doubly sure, she wears a charm. For me, I am neither for charm nor fortune-telling,—if I die, I die, and what then! I've often felt life scarce worth keeping; only one don't know what comes after!"

And with a faint laugh, he rose to go away. I said, "Mark! Mark!"

"What is it?" he said, and stopped. I said, "Don't go away with that light saying in your mouth—"

He said, "Oh!" and smiling, opened the door. I said, looking full at him, "Faith in God is the best amulet."

"It is," he said, more gravely; and went out.

Presently my father came in to supper; and sat down, while it was making ready, near the window, looking out on the river quite calmly. Our large white cat sat purring beside him.

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Stroking her kindly, he said, "Pussy, you must keep close, or your days will be few . . . they've given orders, now, to kill all the dogs and cats. I believe, Cherry, we are as safe here as we should be in the privatest retreat in the kingdom, for infection never harbours on the bridge, the current of air always blows it away, one way or the other. But, my dear, we may be called away at any hour, and I never sleep worse of a night for bearing in mind I may not see another morning. But I rest all the peacefuller, Cherry, for knowing you will never be in want, though this poor business should dwindle away to nothing. Master Benskin and Hugh Braidfoot know all about my little hoard, and will manage it well for you, my daughter. And now, let's see what is under this bright little cover. Pettitoes, as sure as London Bridge is built on woolpacks!" And he ate his frugal meal cheerfully; I thinking in my mind, as I had so often done before, that the firmest heart is oft found in the littlest body.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLAGUE.

AS spring advanced, the plague came on amain. Houses were shut up, some empty, some with infected people in them under guard, ne'er to be let out, save in perfect health, or to be cast into the dead-cart. Swarms of people hurried out of town, some in health, some already infected: never was such a blockade of carts, coaches, and horsemen on the bridge; and I was told, on the northern and western roads 'twas still worse. Every horse, good and bad, was in request, at enormous hire: as soon as they had done duty for one party, they came back for

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another, so that the poor things had an ill time o't. The court set the example of running away; the nobility and gentry followed it; the soldiers were all sent to country quarters, the Tower was left under the guard of a few beef-eaters, all the courts of law were closed, and even the middle and lower ranks, that could not well afford to leave their shops and houses, thought it a good matter to escape for bare life, and live about the country in removed places, camping in the fields, and under hedges.

Thus the city, which had previously been so over-filled as to provoke the comparing of it with Jerusalem before the last passover, was in a manner so depopulated, that though vast numbers remained in its by-streets and lanes, whole rows of houses stood empty. Those that walked abroad kept the middle of the streets, for fear of infection; grass began to grow between the paving-stones; the sound of wheels was scarce heard, for people were afraid of using the hackney-coaches; beggars, and street-singers, and hawkers,

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had altogether disappeared; so that there was nothing to break the awful stillness save the shrieks of dying persons in lone houses, or the rumbling of the dead-cart.

Meanwhile, though the distemper was raging on both sides of us and all about us, it came not on the bridge. Crowded assemblages of buyers and sellers at markets, &c., being much to be avoided, we laid in as much stock as our small premises would hold, and our small family require, of soap, candles, groceries, cheese, bacon, salt, butter, and such-like. And whereas the plague raged worse than anywhere among the butchers' stalls and low fishmongers, we made a merit of necessity, and fasted from both fish and fresh meat, as well for our health as our sins, which, if sundry others had done in a proper frame and temper, 'tis likely they might have been spared.

Thus we kept close and went abroad little, except to public prayers; reading and meditating much at home, and considering, as Noah and his family probably did in the Ark, that if our con-

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finement were irksome, 'twas a cheap price to pay for safety. Of the Blenkinsops we saw nothing after the regular outburst of the calamity; but we knew that Mistress Blenkinsop was not only resolved not to stir, but that she would not so much as lay in stores for daily consumption; perversely and cruelly persisting in sending her servants into the danger she feared not for herself, to purchase pennyworths of things she might have bought wholesale.

Meantime, though our bridge, by reason of its being one of the great thoroughfares of London, could not well be shut up, yet the bridge-wardens took all the care of us they could, keeping the gates with much jealousy, and burning large fires of resinous and strong-smelling substances. Early in the season, there was one person who took a mighty panic at her own danger, which was Mistress Armytage. She had left her lodgings, ostensibly to be with Kitty during her confinement, but in reality, as the event proved, to be out of the reach of infection. However, the news

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of each day, which she greedily gathered, becoming dismaller, and the crowds of people pouring out of town exciting her desire to be among them, she wearied Hugh Braidfoot with entreaties that he would promise to go into the country as soon as Kitty got about again; and, one night, a coffin leaping into her lap out of the fire, her fears for herself could no longer be allayed, but she declared she must go the next morning, come what would. I heard much sobbing and loud talking through the wall over-night; and the next morning at daybreak, saw the widow departing with a small bundle in her hand, and a young lad carrying her heavy box. However, the end, which was impressive, was this. She over-heated herself in her selfish flight, slept in a damp bed the next night, and took a hurt which ended her life before the year was out, though not by the plague.

Soon after, Kitty gave birth to twin daughters, the sweetest little dears that ever were seen, whom she very prettily insisted on naming Violet

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and Cherry. But now, the plague being more and more talked of, and she being unable to nurse both, it became a momentous question with her whether to bring one up by hand or send it to a foster-nurse in the country. At length, the latter was decided upon; and little Violet was put out to nurse at Lewisham.

And now the judgment of God fell very heavy on us; insomuch that amid the general visitation and bereavement, it would have been strange indeed if even the unafflicted could have been so unfeeling as to hold back from the general mourning. The cry from every pulpit and every altar was, "Spare, O Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood;" and the churches were open all day long and crowded with penitents, till it was found that contagion was thereby augmented: whereon all but the bold fell to exchanging public for private devotion.

About this time, poor Kitty Braidfoot fell into much danger. She was nursing her little Cherry

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one morning, and saying to me how her heart yearned for a sight of its twin-sister, when, as if in answer to her wish, in comes the foster-nurse, looking defiant and heated, with the infant in her arms, whom without more ado she sets upon the table, and then retreats to the door.

"There's your babby, mistress," says she, bluntly, "and you owes me one and twenty shillings for the last six weeks' nursing, at three and sixpence a week . . . it's taken the plague, and I can't have my own babby infected, so I declines the farther charge of it—'tis a puny little thing, and I doesn't think would anyhow ha' lived long."

"Puny!" cries Kitty, with eyes darting fire, "why, you've starved it for the sake of your own baby! 'Twas as fine a child as this, and now a downright skeleton!"

The woman had an answer on her lips, but something in Kitty's eye and in her own heart suddenly abashed her; and with a "Marry come up!" she hastily turned about and quitted the

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house, without so much as asking again for her one and twenty shillings. Poor Kitty exclaimed, "Oh, you little starveling!" and bursting into tears, put Cherry into my arms, and began to unfasten her own dress. I said, "Remember, you cannot nurse both—." She said, "I must commit the other to you to bring up by hand and keep out of the infection—I cannot let this little thing perish;" and showered on it kisses and tears, quite thoughtless of her own safety.

Just then, Hugh came in, and stood amazed when he saw Kitty fondling the famished little infant. She, thoughtful of him also before herself, cried, "Don't come near me, Hugh! baby has the plague. I'm thankful the woman brought it home; God forbid a child of mine should endanger a child of hers!" And pressed her little one yet closer to her, and kissed its little, meagre hands. Poor Hugh stood aghast at the news, regarding her from where he first stood with a mixture of wonder, admiration, and fear; at length exclaiming, "God be your blessing,

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Kitty!"—he brushed off a tear and turned away. Again saw I that the strongest heart is not always in the biggest body. As for Kitty, I thought she had never looked so beautiful as that moment. She was now eagerly seeking for some token of the disease about her child, but could find none. "What and if 'twere a false alarm?" cries she,—"Heaven grant it!—But now, dear Cherry, take your little charge out of harm's reach—and bid Nell tend dear Hugh all she can —I've everything I want here, and they can set down my meals at the door without coming in."

I looked back at her as I closed the door, and saw her smiling so over her baby that it really seemed as if she felt she had in it everything she wanted. And when I lay down by my little Cherry at night, and felt its little mites of hands straying over my face, I felt drawn towards it with a love I had never experienced for a child before, and wondered not how Kitty, who might call it part and parcel of herself, could so cheerfully risk her own life for that of her child.

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Next morning, both our heads were thrust simultaneously out of our bed-room windows. "Violet is doing purely," cries she, "there's no plague-spot—How is Cherry?" We exchanged congratulations and heartfelt blessings.

In short, it proved a false alarm; but as Cherry was so miraculously contented under my care, her mother would not have her back till every fear of danger was over, by which time the pretty creature was well weaned. If Hugh had loved his wife before this, he now absolutely adored her: he said he had learned the value of his treasures too dearly to run any farther risk of losing them, come what might to his business. So he shut up shop, left an old woman in charge, bought a tent, horse, and cart, and everything else he wanted or could take; and, one fair morning, he mounted Kitty, alf smiling, under the tilt, with a darling on each arm, and bags, baskets, and crockery-ware all about her; and shouldering his carter's whip, started off with his family for Kent, like a blithe, honest patriarch.

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CHAPTER IX.

FORESHADOWS.

AH! with that little gipsy-party went all the smiles I was to see for many a day, though I knew it not.

My father about this time seemed dull and sorry of cheer. I asked him if aught ailed him in body or mind, or had gone wrong in his affairs. He said no—that he was sensible of a heaviness on his spirits, but could no ways account for it. And, with that stoutness of heart which had become a second nature, he bustled about and tried to cast it off. Still I watched him narrowly, but could detect no signs

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of disorder. I lay awake at night, thinking of him; and amid the stillness all about, could faintly hear the distant wail of that poor distracted madman, who incessantly ran about the streets of the city, crying, "Oh! the great and dreadful God!"

After breakfast, my father said to me, "Cherry, I shall be absent for an hour or two, but you may expect me punctually at dinner."

I said, "Oh, Father! why must you go forth? is there any pressing occasion?"

"Why, yes, there is," said he; "for a man who owes me money is going to make the plague a pretext for leaving the country, and has succeeded, I understand, in getting a clean bill of health."

I said, "Let it be, if it be no great matter."

"Nay," he said, gently, "it *is* a great matter to people in our condition, with whom trade is at a stand-still. I have not yet held aloof from any necessary affairs, but I give you my word I will run no needless risks."

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And so was going forth, when I said, "There is a little white on your shoulder," and brushed it off with my apron. When I had done it, he turned about and kissed me.

We were to have bacon and eggs that day. I had a presentiment he would be after his time, in spite of what he had said, and told Dolly not to fry them till he came in. Hour after hour passed, long after dinner-time, and still he came not. Then I grew troubled, and kept looking along the bridge.

At last, when it was growing dusk, I put on my hood and went to the bridge gate. I said to the gate-keeper, "Did you see my father pass the gate this morning, Master Princeps?"

"Yes, Mistress Cherry, I did," returned he, "more by token he said he was going either through or to Lime Street, I forget which."

I said, "I can't think why he don't come back."

"Oh!" says he, "he'll be back presently," which, though spoken entirely at random, yet

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being uttered in a cheerful tone, somewhat heartened me, and I returned home.

Master Benskin was putting up his shop shutters. I said, "I can't think what has become of my father, Master Benskin." He said, "Has not he come home? Oh, something unforeseen must have delayed him. You know that might happen to any of us." And put the screw in his last shutter.

I said, "What should you do if you were me?" He said, "Well, I'm sure I can't tell what I should do—I don't see I could do anything—he'll come home presently, I dare say . . . don't be uneasy." And went in. I thought, "Job's comforters are ye all."

About ten o' the clock at night I went down to the bridge gate again. They were shutting it up for the night, and making up the great bonfire in the middle of the street. This time I could hardly speak for crying; I said, "Master Prin ceps, I can't think *why* my father doesn't come back! I think something must have happened!"

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"Nay," says he, "what can have happened? Very likely he has been unexpectedly detained, and thinks he shall not be back before the gate is shut, and is too neighbourly to wish to knock me up. So he takes a bed with the friend he is with.—Now we've got it all clear, depend upon it!"

"But," said I, "there's no friend he can be with, that I know of."

"Why, in Lime Street!" says he, with all the confidence imaginable.

"Lime Street? Dear Master Princeps, my father knows nobody in Lime Street."

—"Don't he, though?" says he, doubtfully. "Well, I'm sure I think he said he was going through or to Lime Street, I can't justly remember which."

I turned away in deep disappointment and trouble. As I passed under the deep shade of the houses, some one coming close up to me, said, "Cherry! pretty Cherry! is that you?" But it was not my father's voice, and I passed

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on in disgust. I would not fasten the house-door, and sat just within it all night, a candle set in the window. I opened my Bible at random, in hope of something to hearten and comfort,—the words I lighted on were, "I sought him, but could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." And the page was wet with my tears.

As soon as day broke I was again at the door. People going to market early looked at me strangely as they passed. It struck me my appearance was not very tidy, so I went in, washed and redressed myself, which refreshed me a little, drank a cup of milk, and then put on my hood and went down to the gate. I said, "Master Princeps, I can't think what's come to my father."

"Bless my soul!" cries he, "what, has he not been home all night? Then you see, he *must* be sleeping out, and will not have risen yet, to disturb his friend's family. So, go your ways back, Mistress Cherry, and don't be fretting;

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rely on it, he will return as soon as he has breakfasted, which he cannot have done yet."

So I turned away, sad at my heart; and as I passed John Armytage's shop, I looked up at Violet's window, and saw her dressed, and just putting back her white curtains. She looked down on me, and nodded, and smiled, but I shook my head sorrowfully, and turned my face away. Before I reached my own door, I felt some one twitching my cloak behind, and she comes up to me all panting.

"Cherry! dear Cherry!" says she, breathlessly, "what's the matter?"

"I've lost my father," said I, with filling eyes.

"Dead!" cries she, looking affrighted.

"He may be," said I, bursting into tears, "for he has not come home all night."

"Oh, if that's all," says she, putting her arm round me, and drawing me into the house, "all may yet be well.—How many women might cry, Cherry, if they thought their husbands and

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fathers were dead every time they stayed out all night! Come, tell me all about it—." And she entered with such concern into my grief that its bitterness was allayed.

"Come," she said, "let us give him till dinner-time—he may drop in any minute, you know, and if you go looking for him, you know not where, you may miss him. So give him till dinner-time, and after that, if he comes not, go and knock at every door in Lime Street, if you will."

And she stayed, wiling the slow time as long as she could with talking of this and that. At length dinner-time came; I could scarce await it, and directly the clock struck I started forth. It occurred to me I would go to Mark.

As I approached the gate, I heard Master Princeps say to the second gate-keeper, "I'll lay you a wager this girl is coming again to ask me why she can't find her father."

Instead of which, I only said as I came up to him, "I'm going to look for my father, Master Princeps."

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"Well," says he, "I wish you may find him with all my heart, but it seems like looking for a pin in a hayfield—Perhaps he'll return while you are away . . . take care where you go, the streets and lanes are dangerous—"

There were people paying toll; and while I was waiting to pass, I heard one man ask another if he had seen the great plague-pit dug in Aldgate, forty feet long, and twenty feet deep; adding, he believed many people that were picked up in the streets were cast into it before it was well known if they were dead or alive.

I darted through the toll-gate the moment it was clear, and made for Cheapside. Oh! how awful the change, during a few weeks! Not a creature stirring, where lately all had been alive —At the turn of a lane I met a man wheeling a dead person in a hand-barrow, and turning his own head aside. Houses were deserted or silent, marked with the fatal red cross. Within one, I heard much wailing and sobbing. At length I reached Mark's house. 'Twas all shut up!—and

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a watchman sat smoking on the door-step. He said, "Young woman, what do you want?" I said, "I want to speak to Mark Blenkinsop." . . . He said, "Nobody must go out or in—the house is under visitation."—My heart sank when I remembered Mark's forebodings of himself, and I said, "Is he dead?" "I know not whether he be dead or no," replied the watchman; "a maid-servant was put into the cart the night before last, and a 'prentice the night before that—Since then, they've kept mighty quiet, and asked for nothing, though I've rung the house-bell two or three times. But the night-watch told me that a woman put her head out of window during the night, and called out, 'Oh! death, death, death!' three several times."

I said, "Ring the bell again!"

He did so, and pulled it so violently this time, that the wire broke. We gave each other a blank look.

"See!" said I, "there's a window open on the second story—"

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"'Tis where the woman put out her head and screeched, during the night," said he.

"Could not you get a ladder," said I, "and look in?"

"Well," said he, "I will, if you will stay here and see that no one comes out while I'm gone."

So I said I would, but I should have been a sorry guard had any one indeed rushed forth, so weak was I and trembling. I thought of Mark lying within, perhaps stiff and cold.

Presently the watchman returned with a ladder, but it was too short, so then he had to go for another. This time he was much longer gone, so that I was almost beside myself with waiting. All this time not a creature passed. At length a man came along the middle of the street, holding a red rod before him. He cried, "What do you there?" I said, "We know not whether the family be dead or have deserted the house—a watchman has gone for a ladder to look through the open window." He said, "I will send some one to look to it;" and passed on.

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Then the watchman and another man appeared, carrying a long ladder between them. They set it against the window, and the watchman went up. When he had looked in, he cried out in a fearful voice, "There's a woman in white, lying all along on the floor, seemingly dead, with a casket of jewels in her hand—Shall I go in?"—"Aye, do," I exclaimed. The other man, hearing talk of jewels, cried, "Here, come you down, if you be afraid, and I'll go in;" and gave the ladder a little shake; which, however, only made the watchman at once jump through the window. Then up came two men, saying, "We are from my Lord Mayor, empowered to seal up any property that may be left, if the family indeed be dead."—So they went up the ladder too, and the other man had no mind to go now; and presently the watchman comes out of the house-door, looking very pale, and says he, "Besides the lady on the floor, with all her jewels about her, there's not a soul alive or dead in the house; the others must have escaped over the back-walls and out-houses."

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Then my heart gave a great beat, for I concluded Mark had escaped, leaving his wife to die alone; and now all my thoughts returned to my father. I hastened to one or two acquaintances of his, who, it was just possible, might have seen him; but their houses were one and all shut up, and, lying some way apart from each other, this took up much time. I now grew bewildered and almost wild, not knowing where to look for him; and catching like a drowning man at a straw, I went to Lime Street. Here I went all up one side and all down the other, knocking at every door that was not padlocked. At first I made my inquiries coherently enough, and explained my distress, and got a civil answer; but, as I went on and still did not find him, my wits seemed to unsettle, and, when any one came to the door, which was often not till after much knocking and waiting, I had got nothing to say to them but, "Have you seen my father?" and when they stared and said, "Who is your father?" I could not rightly bring his name to mind. This gave me some sign

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of wildness, I suppose, for after a while the people did not so much look strange as pitying, and said, "Who is your father, poor girl?" and waited patiently for me to answer. All except one rough man, who cried fiercely, "In the dead-pit in Aldgate, very likely, where my only child will be to-night." Then I lost sense altogether, and shrieked, "Oh! he's in the pit! Father! father!" and went running through the streets, a-wringing my hands. At length a voice far off answered, "Daughter! daughter! here I am!" and I rushed towards it, crying, "Oh, where? I'm coming! I'm coming!" And so got nearer and nearer till it was only at the turn of the next street; but when I gained it, I came upon a party of disorderly young men. One of them cries, "Here I am, daughter!" and burst out laughing. But I said, "Oh, you are not he," and brake away from him.

"Stay, I know all about him," cries another; "was he tall or short?" Oh, wicked, wicked

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men, thought I, 'tis such as you that break fathers' hearts!

How I got back to the bridge I know not. I was put to bed in a raging fever. In my deliration I seemed to see my father talking earnestly with another man whose face I knew not, and who appeared to hear him with impatience, and want to leave him, but my father laid his hand upon his arm. Then the other, methought, plucked a heavy bag from under his cloak, and cast it towards my father, crying, "Plague take it, and you too!" Then methought my father took it up and walked off with it into the street, but as he went, he changed colour, stopped short, staggered, and fell. Presently I seemed to hear a bell, and a dismal voice crying, "Bring out your dead!"—and a cart came rumbling along, and a man held a lanthorn to my father's face, and without more ado, took him up and cast him into the cart. Then methought a man in the cart turned the horse about, and drove away without waiting to call anywhere else, to a dismal

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lone field, lying all in the blackness of darkness, where the cart turned about, and shot a heap of senseless bodies into a great yawning pit . . . . them that a few hours back had been strong hearty men, beautiful women, smiling children.

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CHAPTER X.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

WHEN I returned to my reason it was with an inexpressible sense of weakness and weariness. The first thing I saw was dear Violet's face close to mine, her large dark eyes fixed full upon me; and as soon as she saw that I knew her, she exclaims, "Cherry, dear Cherry! I thought I had no more tears left to shed, but I must cry again with pleasure now—" and wept over me.

I said, "Is he come back yet?" She said, "You must only think of getting well now."

"Ah," I said, "I know he is not;" and turned

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my head away. And still felt her warm tears dropping over me. They seemed to heal where they fell; and presently, I shed tears too, which cleared my head, and somewhat relieved me; but oh! the weakness!—

I was very slow getting well. All the while dear Violet kept with me, read to me, cheered me, cherished me . . . oh, what a friend! How trouble brings out the real good in people's characters, if there be any!

Before I was well able to sit up, Master Benskin sent in word he had something important to say to me as soon as I was equal to hearing it. I thought he might have got some clue to my father, and said I was quite equal to hearing anything he had to tell. Then he came in, treading on tip-toe, and looking very awe-stricken; and, says he, "Mistress Cherry,"—taking a chair as he spoke, a good way off from me,—"the lamented event which we may now consider to have taken place . . ."

"No, Master Benskin, no," interrupted I,

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faintly; "I still hope there has been *no* lamented event—"

"Makes it my duty," continued he, without minding me, "to tell you that you need be under no uneasiness about pecuniary circumstances."

"I am not, I assure you," said I. "Oh that I had nothing worse to be uneasy about!"

"This house," continued he, "was your father's for ninety-nine years, and is now yours; and he, moreover, had saved six hundred pounds, three hundred of which he lent me, and three hundred Hugh Braidfoot, we paying him five per cent., which we will continue to pay you, or hand over to you the principal, whichever you like."

"Thank you, Master Benskin," said I, "I should wish everything to continue just as it is . . . I am sure my father's money can't be in better hands; and I shall recommence inquiring for him directly I am strong enough, which I almost am already."

"Ah," said he, with a sorrowful smile and a shake of the head, "how slow women are to give

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up hope! . . . . Sure enough, 'tis one of the cardinal virtues; but they practise it as if 'twere their nature, without making a merit of it. I wish you well from my heart, Miss Cherry."

All this while I was fretting to see Master Blower. I said often to Violet, "I wish Master Blower would look in to see me, and talk to me, and pray with me as he used to do with my mother. Sure, I'm sick enow! and he might, for as long as he has known me, count me the same as one of his own congregation."

And Violet would make answer, "Indeed, Cherry, if you consider how the good man is wearing himself out among his own flock, going hither and thither without setting his life at a pin's purchase, spending all his time in visitation that is not taken up with the services of the church, you need not be surprised he comes not so far as this, especially as he knows not of your affliction nor your illness."

"How do you, that are not a churchwoman, know he does all you say?" said I.

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"I had it from the old woman that brings the curds and whey," returned Violet; "she, you know, is one of his parishioners; and, from what she says of him, it appears he could not do more if he were a Dissenter."

"A Dissenter, indeed! I admire that!" said I. "If he were a slothful, timid, self-indulgent person, you would bestow all his faults on his Church; but because his light shines before men, so that they cannot help glorifying his Father which is in Heaven, you say he could hardly do more if he were a Dissenter!—I shall go to him as soon as ever I get well."

And so I did; while, indeed, I was hardly strong enough for so long a walk; for I had a notion he would tell me where to find my father; or comfort me, maybe, if he thought he could not be found. It was now late in September—His parish was one of the worst in Whitechapel,—he lived in a roomy, gloomy old parsonage-house, too large for a single man, in a street that was now deserted and grass-grown. The first

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thing I saw was a watchman asleep on the steps, which gave me a pang; for, having heard Master Blower was so active in his parish, I somehow had never reckoned on his being among the sick, though that was a very just reason why he should be. I had thought so good a man would lead a charmed life, forgetful that in this world there is often one event to the righteous and to the wicked, and that if the good always escaped, no harm would have befallen my father. However, this sudden shock, for such it was, brought tears into my eyes, and I began to be at my wit's end, who should tell me where to find my father, and to lament over the illness of my good and dear friend, Master Blower. Then I bethought me,—Perhaps he is not in the house, but may have left it in charge of some woman, who is ill,—if I waken the watchman, he certainly will not let me in; the key is grasped firmly in his hand, so firmly that I dare not try to take it, but yet I must and will get in.—

Then I observed that, in carelessly locking the

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door, the lock had overshot it, so that in fact, the door, instead of being locked, would not even shut. So I stept lightly past the watchman and into the house; and the first thing within the threshold was a can of milk, turned quite sour, which showed how long it must have stood without anybody's being able to fetch it. I closed the door softly after me, and went into all the ground-floor rooms; they were empty and close shuttered: the motes dancing in the sunbeams that came through the round holes in the shutters. Then I went softly up-stairs, and looked timidly into one or two chambers, not knowing what ghastly sight I might chance upon; but they were tenantless. As I stood at pause in the midst of one of them, which was a sitting-room, and had one or two chairs out of their places, as if it had been never set to rights since it was last in occupation, I was startled by hearing a man in the room beyond giving a loud, prolonged yawn, as though he were saying, "Ho, ho, ho, ho, hum!" Then all was silent again: I thought it must be Master Blower, and went

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forward, but paused with my hand on the lock. Then I thought I heard a murmuring voice within; and, softly opening the door and looking in, perceived a great four-post bed with dark green curtains drawn close all round it, standing in the midst of a dark oaken floor that had not been bees-waxed recently enough to be slippery. Two or three tall straight-backed chairs stood about; a hat upon one, a boot upon another, quite in the style of Master Blower; and close to the bed was a table, with jugs, cups, and phials, and a night-lamp still burning, though 'twas broad day. The shutters also were partially shut, admitting only one long stream of slanting light over against the bed; but whether any one were in the bed I could not at first make out, for all was as still as death. Presently, however, from within the curtains came a somewhat thick voice, exclaiming, "Oh Lord, my heart is ready, my heart is ready! I will sing and give praise with the best member that I have! Awake, lute and harp! I myself will awake right early!"

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Here the dear good man fell a coughing, as if something stuck in his throat; and I, tip-toeing up to the bedside, withdrew the curtains, and softly said, "Master Blower!"

Never shall I forget my first sight of him! There he lay on his back, with everything quite clean and fresh about him, not routed and tumbled as most men's would have been, but as smooth as if just mangled:—his head, without e'er a night-cap, lying straight on his pillow, his face the mirror of composedness and peaceification, and his great, brown eyes, glowing with some steady, not feverish light, turned slowly round upon me, as if fresh from beholding some beatific, solemnifying sight.

"Why, Cherry," says he, looking much pleased, "are you come to look on me before I die? I thought I had taken my last sight of all below,"—and reaching out his hand to me from under the bedclothes, I was shocked to perceive how it was wasted: every knuckle a perfect knob.

"Don't touch me!" cries he, plucking it away

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again, and burying it out of sight,—"I forgot you hadn't had the plague.—What a selfish fellow I am!—How's your dear father, Cherry?"

I could not withhold myself from weeping, and was unable to answer.

"Ah, I see how it is," says he, kindly; "poor Cherry! poor Cherry! 'the righteous perish and no man layeth it to heart,'—I heard a voice say, 'Write: Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord. Yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours.' . . . I shall see him before you will, Cherry. Go home, child, go home, . . . this air is fraught with danger."

I said, "I am not afraid of it, sir,—I would rather stay awhile with you."

"Well, then," said he, "just give me a drink of water, or anything liquid you can find; for I have had nothing but what I could help myself to these twenty-four hours. My throat is so bad, I cannot swallow anything solid . . . Oh! oh!—" And as he held back his throat to drink, I noticed the plague swellings.

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"That will do nicely, now," sighed he, when I had smoothed his pillow, "and now go, I prithee, dear Cherry, and look after poor Dorcas, who, I fear, must be dead or dying somewhere about the house."

So I did as he bade me; and, as I knew she was not on the floor below, I went in quest of her up-stairs. Dorcas had lived with Master Blower ever since he commenced housekeeping; and had had the help of a younger maid, who now, it seemed, had left or died. She was a widow-woman in her third score, eccentric, like her master, in some matters; but withal, of the sweetest, pleasantest countenance, and of pleasant conditions too, so that they were well matched. She preferred being called Mistress Peach; but Master Blower liked calling her Dorcas, and carried his point.

I found her in the upper story, lying all across her bed, dressed, but more dead than alive. "Alas! young woman," says she . . . "What! is it Mistress Cherry? Heaven be praised! How is my master? Doth he live yet?"

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I said, Yes, and I hoped was going on well.

"Ah," says she, "I left him at death's door, but could no longer keep about myself; so, set him straight as well as I could, and then crawled up here, thinking to bundle my mattress downstairs, and at all events die within hearing of him. But 'twas quite beyond my strength .... I fell all along, and here I've been ever since."

Then she began to groan terribly, but I made her as comfortable as I could, dressed her throat, persuaded her to swallow a little cooling drink, and loosened her clothes; all which she took very thankfully, but then became restless about her master, and prayed me to go down to him, for he wanted me more than she did.

So I returned to Master Blower, whom I now found a good deal more suffering and feverish than when I left him, and beginning to toss about. I quite gave up all intention of leaving the house, yet thought Violet might be uneasy about me; therefore I stepped down to beg the

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watchman to send a message to her; but found the house-door locked.

On my rapping against it and calling, he unlocked it and looked in. "Hallo, young woman," says he, "how came you here?"

"I stepped in while you were asleep," said I, "the door being ajar."

"Asleep? that's a pretty tale to tell of me," quoth he; "I wonder if *you* wouldn't feel sleepy sometimes, sitting from morn to night on a door-step, full in the sun!"

"I want to tell no tales," said I, "but only desire to send word to my friends on the bridge that I cannot return to them at present, being wanted here."

"Return? of course you cannot," says he; "why, do you suppose persons are to be allowed to walk in and out of houses under visitation at their will? 'Tis clear against my Lord Mayor's orders."

This had escaped me; however, it made no difference; and he engaged to let Violet know

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the cause of my detention. Then I returned to my charges, and, to my great surprise, found Dorcas had crawled nearly all down the flight of stairs between her and Master Blower, and was now lying all along. She said, "I thought I must see how master was . . . if you will but tumble the mattress down, Mistress Cherry, I'll lie just within his door,—then you won't have to run up and down stairs so often." It did, indeed, make it easier for me to attend to them both and truly I never had such a night before nor since; for though my dear mother's sufferings had been long drawn out and very sad to witness, they had never amounted to acute agony. The fever of both ran very high all night, and it seemed to me that Master Blower in his derilation went through the whole Book of Job in his head, from the disjointed fragments he uttered here and there. Also he seemed much argufying with an impenitent sinner in his flock, his reasonings and tender persuasives with whom were enough to have melted a stone. As to

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Mistress Peach, I must say her thoughts ran mostly on her jams, . . . she conceited herself opening pot after pot, and finding every one fermented; and kept exclaiming, in a doleful voice, "Oh dear, here's another bishop's wig!" So that, what with being ready to laugh at her and to cry over him, I was quite carried out of myself, and away from my own troubles. Towards day-dawn they both became quiet. I fumigated the room, bathed their temples with vinegar, moistened their mouths, and then knelt down in a corner to pray; after which I dozed a little. I had heard the death-cart going its melancholy round during the night, and had felt thankful we had no dead to be carried out.

In the morning, both my patients seemed bettering. Dorcas, with my help, got to her master's bedside, and looked in on him. "Dear sir," says she, "how are you now?"

"Somewhat easier, but very thirsty, Mistress Peach," says he.

"Oh dear, sir," says she, "don't call me Mis-

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tress Peach, or I shall think you're going to die. I like Dorcas best now. What a mercy it was, sir, Mistress Cherry came in as she did, for we were both at death's door. I dare say, sir, you missed me?"

"How should I do otherwise?" said he, speaking very thick, and with evident pain. . . . "I've got a wasp's nest in my throat, I think. . . . How should I do otherwise, I say, when no one came near me for twenty-four hours?"

"Ah, sir," says she, "I'm sure I beg your pardon for behaving so ill,—for *being* so ill, that is; but indeed I could not help it. I thought," continues she, turning to me, "I wouldn't die, as 'twere, just under his nose, so crawled out of sight; but put everything near him that he could want before I took the liberty of leaving him; and did the best thing I could for him at parting, by putting a fine drawing plaster round his throat. . . . Pray, sir, did it draw?"

"Draw?" cries he, with the first indignant flash I ever saw from his pleasant eyes . . . and

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'twas half humorous, too,—"like a cart-horse! I should have been dead hours ago, you woman, had I kept it on!"

Sorrowful as I was, I could not help bursting out a-laughing, and he did so too, when, suddenly stopping short, and looking very odd—"I don't know whatever has given way in my throat," says he; "but verily I think that laugh has saved me! Here! give me some water, or milk, or anything to drink, for I can swallow now!"

So I gave him some water, and ran downstairs for some milk, the night-watchman having promised to set some within the door. When I got back, there was quite another expression on his face; composed and thankful. Dorcas was shedding tears as she tended him, quite thoughtless of herself.

"Now, Cherry," says he, "do persuade this dear woman to lie down and take care of herself, for she has had faith enough in her famous plasters to put one about her own throat, and

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I know what she must be suffering, or will have to suffer."

So I gently led her back to her mattress, and then, sitting down by Master Blower, fed him with some sponge-cake, that was none the worse for being stale when sopped in milk, warm from the cow. He took it with great satisfaction, and said he hoped I should not think him greedy when I remembered how long he had fasted. Then he would not be peaceified till I went downstairs and breakfasted by myself: telling me his mind to him a kingdom was, or somewhat to that effect, which I could thoroughly believe. When I came back, Dorcas seemed sleeping soundly, though not easily. Master Blower had got the same heavenly look as when I first saw him. I asked him if there were anything I could do for him. He said, Yes, I could read him the fortieth Psalm. When I had done so, he said, "And now you can read me the hundred and sixteenth." That, he said, would do to reflect upon, and I might go my ways now; he should want nothing

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more for a good while. So I sat down in a great arm-chair with a tall back, wherein, the chair being mighty comfortable, and I somewhat o'er-wearied with watching (not being very strong yet), or ever I was aware I fell asleep, which certainly was not very good nursing nor good manners.

When I woke up, which may perhaps have been not so soon as it seemed to me, "Well, Mistress Cherry," says Master Blower, somewhat ironically, "I hope you have had a good nap. A penny for your dream."

I said it had been a wonderful pleasant one . . . too wonderful, I feared, to come true.

"Well, let's have it, nevertheless," says he; "I like hearing wonderful dreams sometimes, when I've nothing better to do. So, now for it."

—When I came to think it over, however, it seemed so different, waking and sleeping, that I despaired of making it seem to him anything like what it had seemed to me.

"Come," said he, "you're making a new one."

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"Oh, no, sir!" said I, "I would not do such a thing on any account.—My dream was this;—only I fear you will call it a comical one. . . . Methought I was walking with you, sir (I beg your pardon for dreaming of you, which I should not have done if I had not been nursing of you, I dare say)—"

"Pardon's granted," says he. "Go on."

"I thought, sir, I was walking with you in a garden all full of roses, pinks, crownations, columbines, jolly-flowers, hearts-ease, and—and . . ."

"A kiss behind the garden-gate," says he.

I was quite thrown out; and said, I did not believe there was such a flower.

"Oh yes, there is," says he,—"Well, but the rest of your dream—"

"That's all, sir."

"*All?*" cries he.

"Yes, sir; only that we went on walking and walking, and the garden was so mighty pleasant."

"Why, you told me there was something wonderful in it!" says he.

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I said it *had* seemed wonderful at the time—

"That there was *not* a kiss behind the garden-gate," says he, laughing. "O fie, Cherry!"

I felt quite ashamed; and said it was very silly to tell dreams, or to believe in them.

"Why, yes," said he, seriously, "it *is* foolish to believe in the disjointed images thrown together by a distempered fancy; though aforetime it oft pleased our Heavenly Father to communicate his will to his servants through the avenues of their sleeping senses. How should you and I be walking in a garden together? There are no gardens in Whitechapel, Cherry. In Berkshire, indeed, my brother the Squire has a garden something like what you describe, full of roses, pinks, and gilly-flowers, with great, flourished iron gates, and broad, turfen walks, and arbours, like green wigs, and clipped hedges full of snails, and ponds full of fish. If I go down there to get well, Cherry, as peradventure I may, for I shall want setting up again before I'm fit for work—(I've fallen away till I'm as thin as Don Quixote!)—I'll

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ask his wife to invite you down, Cherry, to see the garden; and then we'll look up all those flowers we were talking about."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said I, sorrowfully, "but I don't think I can go . . . I must be looking for my father."

"Your father!" cries he, in amaze. "Why, dear Cherry, I thought you told me he was dead!"

I tried to answer him, but could not, and fell a-sobbing.

"Come," says he, quite moved, "I want to hear all this sad story."

When I was composed enough to tell it him, he listened with deep attention, and I saw a tear steal down his cheek.

"Cherry," says he at length, "you must give over hoping he will return, my dear. There is not a likelihood of it. Consider how long a time has elapsed since he went forth; and how many, as dear to their families as your father to you, have been cut off in the streets at a moment's

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notice, and carried off to the dead-pits before they were recognised. For such awful casualties the good are not unprepared. Instead of carrying back infection and desolation to his home, and lingering for hours and days in unspeakable agonies, the good man was doubtless carried at once to the bosom of his God."

Then he spake words that killed hope, and yet brought healing; and after weeping long and plentifully, I began to see things as he did, and to feel convinced I should see my father's face no more: which, indeed, I never did.

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CHAPTER XI.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN WOULD AND SHOULD.

DORCAS, who continued very ill all this day, began thereafter to amend, and was able to take the sole night-watch. But the watchman would not let me go forth, though he would send my messages to Violet, and give me the packages of clothing and so forth that Violet sent me. However, one day a doctor called, and gave as his reason for not coming before, that he had been ill himself. And he said both my patients were in such a fair way of recovery, that he thought in another week I might leave the house without

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danger to myself or others, only attending to the proper fumigations.

Master Blower now sat up in his easy chair, half wakeful, half dozing, for he was too weak to read much. But he liked me to read to him, which I did for hours together; and the subject-matter of the book often gave rise to much pleasant talk, insomuch that I began to be secretly and selfishly sorry that the time was so near at hand when he would be well enough to do without me.

At other times I got him to talk to me about the country-house of his brother the Squire, wherein he himself had been born, and had spent all his boyish days. And when I heard him tell about the little ivy-covered church, and the pretty churchyard planted with flowers, and the rustic congregation in their red cloaks and white frocks, and the village choir with their pipes and rebecks, it seemed to me I would rather, a thousand times, be vicar, or even curate, of such a place as that, than have ever such a large, grand living in Whitechapel. And so I told him.

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At other times I sat sewing quite silent by the window, leaving him to doze if he could; and sometimes I could see without looking up, that his eye would rest on me for a good while at a time. I did not care a pin about it, and made as though I took no notice.

"Cherry," says he, after one of these ruminations, "what have the men been about, that you have never got married?"

I plucked up my spirit on this; and, "Sir," said I, "if you can tell me of any suitable answer I can possibly make to such a question as that, I'll be much obliged to you for it, and will make use of it!"

"Well!" says he, "it *was* a queer question . . . only, the thing seems so wonderful to me! Such a pretty girl as you were when I first knew you!"

"Ah, that was a long while ago, sir," said I, threading my needle.

"It was!" said he, decidedly; and then looking at me in an amused kind of way, to see how I

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took it. "A long while ago, as you say, Cherry! And, do you know, I think exactly the same of you now that I did then!"

"I am much obliged to you, sir," said I; and went to make him a bread-pudding.

Another time, we fell to talking about the awfulness of the visitation, which, he said, he feared would make no lasting impression on the people. And he spoke much about individual sins helping to bring down national chastisements; and individual intercessions and supplications inviting forgiveness of general transgressions; quoting Daniel, and Abraham, and Jeremiah, "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it."

Another time, feeling weaker than common, he began to despond about getting down to his brother the Squire's. I said, "Dear sir, if you are not equal to so long a journey, you can come,

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for change of air, to your old quarters on the bridge."

"Ah, Cherry," said he, faintly, "what would folks say if I did that?"

"Why, what *should* they say, sir?" said I.

"I'm not considering what they *should* say," said he; "what they *would* say, Cherry, would probably be, that I meant to marry you; or ought to mean it."

I said I did not suppose they would or could say any such thing, I being so long known on the bridge,—and he of his years—

"Humph!" said he, "I am but forty-four! To hear you talk, one might think I was a—" . . . I forget what sort of an arian he called himself,—"Do you know what that means, Cherry?"

I said, I believed it was some sort of a Dissenter. On which he laughed outright; and said it meant sixty or seventy years of age, I forget which.

"And I'm not quite such an old codger as

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that," said he, "so I won't accept your kind invitation, though I thank you heartily for it. But we must not let our good be evil spoken of."

All this was spoken in such a simple, genial, attaching sort of a way,—for his manners were always gentle and well nurtured,—that it only went to make me like him more and more, and think what a privilege it was to be thus in hourly communion with Master Blower.

Parting time came at last. It was my own fault if I left not that house a wiser, better, and happier woman. Dorcas and I saw him start off for Berkshire; and there was a tear in my eye when he took my hand to bid me farewell.

"Cherry," said he, still holding my hand, and looking at me with great goodness and sweetness, "I shall never forget that to you, under Heaven, I owe my life. And, by the way, there is something I have often thought of naming to you, only that it never occurred to me at the proper time . . . . a very odd circumstance.—When I escaped to Holland, and, as some people thought,

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was in want of money, I found seven gold pieces in the inside of one of my slippers! Who could have put them there, do you think? Ah, Cherry! —There! God bless you!"

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CHAPTER XII.

CAMPING OUT IN EPPING FOREST.

WHEN I returned home, my neighbours looked strangely on me, as though I were one risen from the dead, after nursing two people through the plague without hurt. I said not much, however, to any of them, except to Violet.

When I had told her all I had to tell, she said, "Well, I think the tale ends rather flatly: you and Master Blower might as well have made a match of it."

"Truly, Violet," said I, "I think women of

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our age may be capable of a disinterested action, without question of match-making."

"As to women of *our* age," retorted she, "speak for yourself, if you please! You may make out yourself to be as old as you will; but I mean to stick at twenty-eight!"

I said not another word, but secretly wondered how strangely tender some people are on the subject of age. Even Master Blower, who had owned to forty-four, did not like me to reckon him at fifty.

It was now quite the latter end of October; the distemper was abating, and people were beginning to venture back to their homes, and a few shops were re-opened. Hugh Braidfoot and his family returned among the rest. But too heedless an exposure to the infection yet lingering among us caused the distemper to rage again with great fury before it abated for good.

I now kept myself close, and spent the chief of the day at my needle or book, working much for the poor, who were like enough to be destitute in

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the winter. First, however, I put on mourning for my poor dear father, whom I could not bear to deny this mark of remembrance, though, the mortality being so great, people had quite left off wearing black for their friends. Much he dwelt in my sad, solitary thoughts; and when they ran not on him, they chiefly settled on Master Blower. The more I considered their characters, the more beauty I found in them.

I never opened the shop-shutters now, except for a little light. Trade was utterly stagnant; and my father's business had dropped with him: the little I might have done in the perfumery line, had the town not been empty, would not have been worth speaking of: it was a mercy, therefore, that my dear father had left me well provided.

One evening, when it was getting too dusk to work or read, and I was falling into a muse, a tall shadow darkened the door, which happened to be ajar, and the next moment a man, whom I did not immediately recognise, entered the parlour and stepped up to me.

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"Cherry! dear Cherry!" he said, in a stifled voice, and took me in his arms with a brother's affection. It was poor Mark.

"Dear Mark!" I said, "where *have* you been? Oh, how often have I thought of you!"

"Aye, Cherry, well you might; and pray for me, too," said he, somewhat wildly. "Oh, what a tale I have to tell you!—You will either hate or despise me."

"You are ill, very ill," said I, looking fearfully at his haggard face; "let me give you something before you say another word."

"Wine then," said he; and drank with avidity the glass I poured out, and then filled it again himself. "Thanks, dear Cherry!—will my uncle be coming in?"

I looked at him and at my dress, and could not speak; but there was no need—"Ah!"—said he; and wrung my hand, and then dropped it.

"Cherry," said he, after a moment's pause, "you know how afraid I was of the plague, and how my wife taunted me for it, and for taking

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the commonest precautions. She herself braved it, defied it; secure in her amulet and fortune-telling. What was worse, she cruelly exposed her servants to it. We had words about it often: bitter words at last. — She accused me, utterly without foundation, of caring more for the servant girl than for her, reviled me for tempting my own fate by fear; finally, said I should be no great loss, for I had never cared much for her, nor she for me. All this embittered me against her. Well, the poor maid caught the plague at the butchers' stalls, and, the next night, was in the dead-cart. The following day our youngest 'prentice died. The other decamped in the night. I now became nearly mad with fear and anger; and, finding my wife would not stir, or at least, as she said, 'not yet,' I considered that self-preservation was the first law of nature; and, taking a good supply of money with me, I left the house in the night. Fear of being driven back was my sole feeling till I got clear out of London; then, I began to have an impression I

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had done wrong. But 'twas death, 'twas madness to think of turning back. On I went. . . .

"It had been my impression, Cherry, that, with plenty of money in my pocket, I could make my way wherever I would; but now, in whatever direction I went, I came upon a watchman, who, because I had no clean bill of health to show, would not let me pass. At length, after running hither and thither, throughout the night, I came upon a couple of men, with a small cart and horse. They seemed to be in the same strait as myself, and talked of fetching a compass to Bow. I asked them to let me join them, and they consented. They were a rough sort of fellows; one it seemed had deserted his mother, the other his wife. Their conduct, and their brutal way of talking of it, only made mine seem more ugly.

"On Bow Bridge the watch would have questioned us, but we crossed the road into a narrow way leading to Old Ford. Afterwards we got on to Homerton and Hackney, and at length into the northern road. Here we went on till we saw

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some men running towards us; then we struck into a lane, halted at a barn, and had some bread and cheese. The food was theirs, but I paid for my share; and I saw them curiously eyeing my money. Afterwards they asked one or two questions about my resources, which I did not much like.

"Well, we kept on till we were many miles from London, occasionally dodging villages and constables. At nightfall we reached the skirt of a wood. Here my companions proposed to sleep; but as soon as they were fairly off, I stole away. I wandered a long way from them in the wood; at length took refuge in a cow-shed. I thought I heard voices, not far off, which made me uneasy; however, I was so tired that I fell asleep.

"As soon as day dawned, I made off; and, not knowing which track to take, went on at random, till I came to a large old barn. To my surprise, I heard some one praying within. I looked in, and saw, not one, but a dozen men, and two or three women and children. I stood reverently

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aside till the old man had done, and heard him pray that they might all continue to be spared from the awful visitation. When they uncovered their faces, I stept forward, on which there was a loud cry, and they warned me off. It was to no use speaking, they would not hear me as I had no passport. Dispirited and hungry, I strayed away till I came to the skirt of the wood, in sight of a cluster of houses. I was about to make for them, when three men, with a pitchfork, bludgeon, and horsewhip rushed upon me and collared me, saying, 'Here's one of them!'—I struggled, and said, 'One of whom? I belong to no party, and am a healthy, innocent man.' 'That sounds well,' said one of them, 'but we guess you are one of a gang that, after threatening and intimidating our town yesterday, broke into a lone farm-house last night; so we'll take you before a magistrate.' 'Do so,' said I, 'for it will be better than starving in the wood, and I shall be able to clear myself.' So, after a time, finding I made no resistance, they gave over dragging me, and let me walk by

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myself, only keeping close about me, with an ugly bull-dog at my heels. However, I did not feel over sure, Cherry, that my story would satisfy the magistrate, so when we reached a small public-house where we found a constable, I privately slipped a half-crown into his hand, and he, after a little parley, gave it as his opinion that I was an honest man, whereon the others desisted from giving me in charge. But they would by no means admit me into the house, only brought out some bread and beer, and set them at a distance, and then went away while I ate and drank.

"There seemed nothing to do but to turn again into the wood; and as I was without object, foot-sore, and spiritless, I paused at the first inviting spot I came to, and cast myself along under a tree. Here I suppose I slept a good while: when I awoke, it was with a strange sense of depression, and it occurred to me I might be plague-stricken after all. As if I could fly yet from the distemper, if that were the case, I resolved to be moving; for I had no mind to die like a rat in a

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hole. Just then I heard voices close on the other side the tree; and, eyeing the speakers between the branches, could make out a numerous band of men and a few women, who were eating and drinking. I did not like their appearance much, and thought of retreating, when one of them, seeing me stir, cries, 'A spy!' and drags me into the midst. I was pretty roughly handled till they settled it to their minds I was a harmless sort of a fellow; and then they told me they would let me join the crew if I would cast my lot among them, and put whatever I had about me into the common stock. I was no ways minded to do this; however, I gave them a few shillings, which, after a little demur, they took, and I then was free of the company. I soon had reason to apprehend they were the band who had affrighted the townsmen the day before, and plundered the farm in the night; and it seemed as if a select council of them were concerting something of the sort again, though they did not invite me to participate. As this was not the sort of company I

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had any mind to associate with, I dragged through the afternoon and evening as well as I could, mostly apart. They then began to put up booths and tents for the night, at which I was glad to assist, rather than do nothing; but I lay a little way off, under a tree. In the night I felt some one lugging at the little parcel of clothing I laid my head upon.—I hit a blow at random, which made whoever it was move off without a word; and then I thought it was time for me to move off too. I got away unperceived, and could not settle again all night. When day broke, I was in a part of the forest that was new to me. . . . The sun was shining on some gnarled old oaks, and along green glades; there were birds singing, hares running across the grass, and wild-flowers overhanging a little brook of clear water. Oh, Cherry! how I should have enjoyed idling in such a place if I had had a quiet mind!

"I drank some water and washed my face; and just then I saw some women passing through the trees, carrying large, country loaves, and tin cans

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of milk. They did not see me, but set down their burthens near a large stone. Then they retreated and stood a little way off, and presently, two pretty-looking girls came tripping out of the wood, took up the loaves, emptied the milk into brown pitchers of their own, put some silver on the stone, and cried, 'Here's your money, good people!'

"Then they returned into the wood, and I followed them. I said, 'Shall I carry one of your pitchers?' They looked affrighted, and cried, 'Pray, sir, keep off . . . how do we know that you may not have the plague?' I said, 'I assure you it was to escape from the plague that I came into the wood, and here I seem likely to starve, though I have plenty of money.' They looked at one another, and said, 'If it be true, his case is hard, —let us tell my father.' They went away, and by and by an elderly man came to me from among the trees. He questioned me very narrowly, and satisfying himself at length that I was both sound and respectable, he admitted me to their little

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encampment, which consisted of five or six little huts, a family in each; besides a few cabins the single men had set up for themselves. I did the like, added my stock to theirs, and continued with them all the time their encampment lasted, which was till yesterday, when, the weather turning cold, and the news of the abatement of the distemper having reached us, we resolved to return to our homes.—I could make you quite in love with our camp life, Cherry, if I chose to enlarge upon some things, and leave others out of sight, —in short, make it appear the thing it was not. But, honestly speaking, though we were very thankful to buy our safety at the price of much inconvenience, all the romance of our situation soon faded away, and we were right glad to set our faces homewards again, even without being fully certified we could do so with impunity.

"But, to what a home did I return! The house was padlocked up, and everything in the possession of the Lord Mayor. And, from a watchman out of employ, who was taking care of

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a house over the way, and who did not know me, I heard the circumstances of my wife's frightful death. Oh, Cherry! we did not care for each other much; but I fear it was cowardly and cruel of me to forsake her!"

—And Mark laid his head on his arms and wept. Presently he said, "What to do I know not. I shall be able, by application to the Lord Mayor to-morrow, to get back my house and property; but—to tell you the truth—I have no great fancy to go back there; at any rate, till the house has been well fumigated. So that .... will you take compassion on me, and let me return awhile to my old quarters, Cherry?"

Of course I said I would.

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CHAPTER XIII.

GHOSTS.

IT was now supper-time; and Mark, having lessened the sense of his troubles by telling of them, although he began by thinking he could not eat a mouthful, ended by making a very hearty supper. Indeed, he so much commended the one or two simple dishes set upon the table, and spoke so strongly, though briefly, on the subject of good and bad cookery, that, as it had been his disposition to be contented with anything that was set before him in his unmarried days, I set it all down to the discomfort of his late life

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in the forest. Afterwards I was disposed to change my mind about this, and to decide that Mistress Blenkinsop, who, in their early married days, had pampered and petted him amazingly (whereby his good looks had suffered no little), had really destroyed the simple tastes which were once so becoming in him, and had made him something of an epicure.

After the table was cleared, he drew near me again, and with real concern in his manner, pressed me to tell him about my father. I did so from first to last, with many tears; adding thereunto my nursing of Master Blower. He sighed a good many times as I went on, and after I had done; exclaiming at last, "What a difference between you and me!"

"All people have not the same qualifications," said I.

"No," said he, and seemed to think I had now hit the right nail on the head.

"And Violet—" said he, after a pause, and colouring deeply. "Is she quite well, Cherry?"

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"Quite," I said; and could think of nothing more to say.

"I wonder," said he, in a low voice, as if he were almost afraid to hear the echo of his own thoughts, "whether she would now have anything to say to me?"

I said, looking away from him, "Such questions as that should only be put to the parties concerned."

"You are right," said he; and sat a long while silent, leaning his head upon his hand. At length he said, "I am rich now, and she is poor, Cherry."

I said, "Riches and poverty don't make much difference, Mark, when people really love one another."

"As I have loved—" said he.

I said, "It is bedtime now, and here is Dolly coming in to prayers."

The next morning, he said he must go to the Lord Mayor about his house. For the abandoned effects of such families as were entirely swept

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away and left no known heirs, went to the King, who made them over to the Lord Mayor and aldermen, to be applied to the use of the poor; and Mark's absence had made it appear that his property was in that case.

Soon after he was gone, the uncommon, and, I may almost say unparalleled event occurred to me of receiving a letter; I was so surprised at the circumstance, that for the moment, I thought it must be *from my father;* or, at least, to tell me he was alive. But no, it was from Master Blower; and this was what he put in it.

"Bucklands Hall, Berks.

"*Oct.* 27, 1665.

"Dear Mistress Cherry,

"On first coming down here, I was so ill at ease and out of sorts, as to require much care and nursing. Heaven be praised, I am now well, and I hope you are the same. Though the pinks and gilly-flowers are pretty well over, there are still some gay autumn flowers in the old garden with

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the iron gate; and my brother the Squire, and his good wife want to see the brave Mistress Cherry who nursed me through the plague. So come down to us, dear Cherry, to-morrow if you can. John Coachman (a steady man), will be at your door, with a white horse and a pillion, at seven o' the clock. And be so good, if it will not be inconvenient to you, as to bring my sister-in-law a little mace and green ginger; and also (on my account) one of those saffron-cakes they used to be so famous for at the bridge-foot.

"Your faithful and obliged friend,

"NATHANAEL BLOWER.

"If you don't come, you must write."

Here was an event! An invitation to the country was a still more startling occurrence than the receipt of a letter. Many of the circumstances connected with it were delightful; but then it seemed so strange, so awful, to go to stay with people I had never seen, . . . such grand people, too! I that was so unused to fine com-

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pany, and did not know how to behave!—And Master Blower knew all this, knew exactly what I was, and yet had prevailed with them to say they should be happy to see me!—Oh, his goodness of heart had this time carried him too far! They had said so just to please him, without expecting I should go!—And yet, if the lady were *very* much put to it for mace and green ginger . . . And if Master Blower's heart were very much set upon giving her the saffron-cake . . . I supposed I had better go. If I found myself very much out of place, I could come away the next day.

Then I thought I would go and consult Violet; for, in fact, I wanted a little persuading to do what I very much liked. So I stepped across the bridge. The shop was open, but nobody was in it; so I went to the parlour door, and opened it.

Directly I had done so, I saw Violet and Mark, sitting close together, their backs to me, and his arm round her waist. I closed the door so softly that they did not know it had been opened, and

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went home. A pang shot through my heart. It was entirely on their own accounts, for I had ceased, for years, to have anything but a most sisterly concern in him; and his character, compared with those of the people I had most loved, failed to stand the test: but I thought this was too quick, too sudden, to be quite comely or decent; there was too much passion, too little self-respect.

I now made up my mind without any more hesitation, that I would go into the country. I gave my parting directions to Dolly, and desired her to let Mark have things comfortable. Then I made up my little travelling-equipage, not forgetting my commissions. Being in fresh, well-made mourning, there was no trouble or anxiety about dress. I quite enjoyed the pleasing bustle of preparation, though I did not expect to be absent longer than a week.

Mark was not very punctual to the supper-hour; and as he said nothing of his visit over the way, I was to conclude him all day at my

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Lord Mayor's, or in Cheapside. But the deep carmine of his cheek, and the burning light of his eye, told tales. I asked him if he had dined. He carelessly replied yes, with a friend. I asked him if he had seen the Lord Mayor. He said yes, it had been a more troublesome business than he expected: they had asked him so many searching questions, and had got the whole story out of him. He feared he had cut a sorry figure. At any rate, he had in his own sight. Then I asked him whether he had got back his house. He said yes, and had put an old woman into it, who had undertaken to fumigate it. Everything seemed sealed up, but he could not help fearing many things were gone. The old place looked so dismal, he came away as soon as he could.

After a pause, he said, "Cherry, I feel a strong inclination to get rid of that concern altogether. The situation is capital, and I shall get something for the business; but I have a great mind to set up somewhere else; and though your father's was a much smaller business than ours, yet my

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happiest hours have been passed under this roof; and if you like to give up the shop to me, I will give for it whatever I get for my own. And you can still live with us. . . : I mean, we can still live here together. What say you, Cherry?"

I said, "Dear Mark, I have no wish to receive for these premises what you get for your own. The shop you are welcome to; the business you will have to remake for yourself, for it has dwindled quite away; I shall be very glad to continue to live with you as long as you like to have me."

"We . . . I shall *always* like to have you, Cherry," said he, "for there is only one person dearer to me in the whole world."

"My father has left me so comfortably provided," said I, "that I shall never need to be a burthen on any one."

"I am glad of it for your own sake," returned he; "but, as to my taking up the business without paying for it, that is not to be thought of. Whatever I get for mine you shall have for yours."

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"So let it stand at present, at any rate," said I. "Henceforth, the shop is yours. And, Mark, you will have the whole house to yourself to-morrow, for I am going into the country."

"Where?" said he, opening his eyes very wide.

"To Bucklands Hall, in Berkshire; to stay with Master . . . . with Squire and Mistress Blower."

A broad smile spread over his face. "I am very glad indeed to hear of it, Cherry," said he.—"*Very* glad of it."

Afterwards, as we sat chatting over our supper, we got on the subject of ghosts. He asked me if I believed in them. I said no.

"Well, I do," said he, sighing. And told me of a story he had had from the servant of Sir Richard Hart, who, travelling with his master, had been summoned by him early one morning, and charged to ride home with all speed, a distance of seventeen miles, and see how fared his daughter, whom he conceited to have seen in the

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night, standing at his bed-foot, with her hand pressed to her head. The man rode back as he was told; and returned with the news that the young lady had indeed been taken ill about four o'clock that morning, but had had a doctor with her, and was now pretty well again. However, in the course of the day she died.

I said, "Her father, in a dream, may have had so strong an impression he was waking, that to him it had all the effect of being awake."

"But such a dream as should so raise the dead, or pre-figure their death, Cherry," said Mark, "would be as bad as if they *were* raised—to *us* . . . I think I, for one, could not stand it." And I saw then why he was afraid to return to his own house.

We talked the matter quietly over for some time: and I asked him why, if the course taken by Divine Providence in the administration of human affairs ever admitted of the re-appearance of the dead, the recorded cases of such supposed appearances should only be to frighten some

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timid person, restore a bag of gold, or acquaint some one with what they would otherwise know a few hours after. This appeared to strike him; but he said it might be for the sake of warning. I said, If for warning, why not for comfort? How glad should I have been, for instance, to be informed supernaturally that all was well with my father! He said, not *that* way, surely. I replied yes, that way, or any way that it had pleased the Almighty to vouchsafe me such knowledge. I should not be afraid (and there was an intensity of earnestness in me as I said it) to see either him or my mother, either in or out of the body.

"Well," muttered he, half under his breath, "I wish I could feel as much with regard to my wife." And, regarding me with some earnestness, added, "You're a bold little thing, Cherry!"

As I wished him good night, he stayed me for a moment, and said, with all his old frankness and trust, "Violet and I have made things out between us, Cherry."

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I said, fervently, "Then, may you both be happy. My belief is, that she is likelier to make you happy now than she was before."

"Not quite so pretty, though," said he, rather regretfully. "However, I don't mind that.—For, you see, Cherry, *I love her!*"

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CHAPTER XIV.

RIDING A PILLION.

DOLLY and I had spent great part of the afternoon in brushing up and cleaning an old black riding-skirt of my mother's, which it was a wonder I had not cut up into garments for the poor. When we had cleaned it with Hollands, and ironed it nicely, it looked very well; for our house was so airy, that our clothes never had the moth.

Precisely at the hour named, an old man in purple livery rode up to the door, on a grey horse with a pillion. Mark, who was very lively this morning, told me he thought the horse

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looked like a bolter; but I knew he was only laughing at me. Then he asked me how I meant to mount; I said, with a chair, to be sure. He said, "Nonsense!" and lifted me up in a moment, and arranged my riding-skirt as nicely as if he had been a lady's groom. Then he told the old man to be careful of me; but the old coachman proved to be both dull and deaf, by reason of great age; so Mark whispered me that he was not afraid of his running away with me, if the horse did not; finishing with "Good-bye, Mistress Blower."

I gave him an indignant look, and said, "For shame, Mark! I have not deserved that!"

"Well," said he, "*I* think you *have*." And just then the old man jerked the rein of the old horse, which moved off so suddenly, that I was fain to catch hold of the old man's coat; and the last glance I had of Mark was a merry one.

At first I felt a little bit frightened; but soon got used to my new position; especially as the horse walked till we were off the stones. Still

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we seemed a long while getting out of London; and we met a great many people returning to it, in carts, waggons, and coaches.

At length we got quite out of town, and between green hedges, with trees beyond them that were turning all manner of colours; with only a house here and there, or a wayside inn. At one of the latter we stopped in the middle of the day, to rest the horse, and take some refreshment. Then we continued our journey, which lasted till sunset, and the latter part of which was mighty pleasant and delightsome; only I was beginning to be a little weary with so much shaking. But, when I saw how charming a place the country was, I wondered how people could live in towns . . . unless on a bridge.

At length we turned off the highway into a bye-road, shaded with tall trees, which, after a mile or two, brought us to a straggling village; and, says the coachman, "Mistress, now we's in Bucklands." Presently we passed the absolutest curiosity of a little old church! . . . it seemed

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hardly bigger than a nutmeg-grater!—and, hard by it, the old parsonage, with three stone peaks in front, and a great pear-tree before the door.

Then we came to a village green, with a clump of large trees in the midst, that had seats round them, whereon sat old men, while young men played cricket, and little boys were setting a puppy to bark at some white geese. Here we came to a great iron gate, at which stood a hale, hearty-looking gentleman, about fifty; square-built, and not over tall; with a good-humoured, red, mottled face. And, says he, coming up to me, as we stopped, "Mistress Cherry, I'm Squire Blower. I can guess who you are, though my brother did not tell me you were such a pretty girl.—Oh, the sinner!" And lifted me off the horse.

"Well," says he, "you don't look quite sure that I's I. . . . I *am*, though! Certainly, not much like Nat, who was always the beauty of the family. Ah! now you laugh, which was just what I wanted. My brother said your silver

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laugh saved his life;—do you know what he meant by that?"

We were now walking up a straight gravel walk, between clipped hedges, to an old red-brick house, with stone facings. "I suppose, sir," said I, after thinking a little, "he meant that my laughing was as good as silver to him, because it saved him the doctor."

"That was it, no doubt," returns he; "just such an answer, Mistress Cherry, as I expected. I see we shall get on very well together, though Nat is not here to help the acquaintance.—He has gone to see his old foster-mother, who is dying. People *will* die, you know, when they get to eighty or ninety."

We were now going up a flight of shallow steps, with stone ballusters, which led us into a hall paved with great diamonds of black and white marble, and hung about with guns, fishing-rods, and stags' horns. An almanack and King Charles's golden rules were pasted against the wall; and a stuffed otter in a glass case hung

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over the great fireplace, where a wood-fire burned on the hearth.

Before this wood-fire was spread a small Turkey carpet; and on the carpet stood a table and four heavy chairs; in one of which sat an old lady knitting. The Squire bluntly accosted her with "Mother, here's Mistress Cherry;" on which she said, "Ho!"—laid down her knitting, and looked hard at me; first over, and then through her spectacles.

"Hum!" says she, "Mistress Cherry, you are welcome. A good day to you. Pray make yourself at home, and be seated."

So I sat down over against her, and we looked at each other very stiff. She was short and fat, with round blue eyes, and a rosy complexion; and had a sharper, shrewder look than the Squire.

"I dare say she's hungry, mother," says the Squire; "give her a piece of gingerbread, or something.—How soon shall we have supper?"

"You are always in such a hurry, father, to

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be eating," says his lady. "Forsooth, are we not to wait for your brother?"

And, without waiting for his answer, she took a bunch of keys from her apron string, and unlocked a little corner-cupboard, from which she brought me a slice of rich seed-cake and a large glass of wine.

"Thank you, madam; I am not hungry," said I.

"Pooh! child, you must be;" returns she, rather authoritatively. "Never be afraid of eating and drinking before company, as if it were a crime!"

So, thus admonished, I ate and drank: though I would as lief have waited a little.

"Are you stiff with your ride?" says she.

"A little, madam," said I; "for I was ne'er on a horse before."

"Is it possible?" cries she, bursting out a-laughing. "Father, did you hear that?"

"Famous!" said he; and they eyed me as if I were a curiosity.

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"Do you know, now," says the Squire's lady to me, after a while, "I never was in Lunnon!"

"That seems as strange to me, madam," said I, "as it seems to you that I should never have been on horseback."

"It *is* strange," says she. "Both are strange."

"And now *I'll* tell you something that is strange," says the Squire, "since we all seem surprising one another. Do you know, Mistress Cherry," stepping up behind his wife, and laying a hand on each of her shoulders, while he spoke to me over her head, "that this little round-about woman was once as pretty a girl as you are?"

"Stuff! Squire," says his lady.

"Fact!" persisted he. "Nay, prettier!"

"Not a word of truth in it," says she, shaking him off. "I was all very well,—nothing more. Come, father, here's Gatty going to spread the cloth for supper, which you'll be glad of. But, Gatty, in the first place, show Mistress Cherry to her chamber, . . . she will perhaps like to

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dress a little. You'll excuse my attending you, my dear; the stairs try my breath."

I followed Gatty up-stairs to the prettiest room that ever was! When I came down, the cloth was spread, and the Squire's lady signed me to the chair over against her, and was just going to say something, when, crossing between me and the sun, I saw the shadow of a man against the wall, and knew it for Master Blower's. Ah! what came over me at that moment, to make me so stupid, I know not. Perhaps that saucy saying of Mark's . . . but whatever it was, instead of my going up to Master Blower, when he came in, which he did the next moment, and asking him, simply and straightforwardly, how he was, I must needs colour all over like a goose, and wait till he came quite up to me, without having a word to say for myself.

"Ah, Cherry!" says he, taking my hand quite frankly, "how glad I am to see you! Are you quite well?"

And, the moment I heard his pleasant voice,

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I was quite comfortable again, and felt myself at home for the first time.

"Quite, thank you, sir," said I; "and I hope you are better than you were."

"Well, now that civil things have passed on both sides," said the Squire, who had already seated himself, "come and say grace, Nat, for here's a couple of beautiful fowls getting cold."

—Well, the supper was as pleasant as could be, and it was growing quite dusk before the table was cleared, yet the Squire would not hear of having candles; so then his lady desired Gatty to carry lights into the green parlour, "Where," says she, "I and this young person will retire, and be good enough company for each other, I dare say."

Oh, I'm a young person, am I? thought I. So I followed her into the green parlour, where she settled herself in an easy chair, with her feet on a footstool, and made me sit facing her. "Now," says she, "the men can prose by them-

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selves, and we'll have a coze by *our*selves. Pray, child, how was it you came to think of nursing my brother?"

So I began to tell her how I went to him in hope of his telling me how to find my father; but then she wanted to know how my father came to be missing, so I had to go further back. And then I could not help putting in by the way how good and excellent a man he was, how tender a father, how loving a husband, which brought in my mother. But I checked myself, and begged the lady's pardon for entering on that, which I knew could no ways interest her.—"Nay, let me hear it all," says she, "I shall like to hear something about your mother." So then I told her of her holy life, and saint-like end; and of Master Blower's invaluable ministrations, which of course interested her a good deal; and, indeed, I saw a tear steal down her cheek, while I kept mine down as well as I could. Then I went on to the plague, and my father's heaviness of spirits; and his going forth and never coming

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back, and my going in quest of him, and all the events of that terrible day, which I could not go over without crying very heartily. She wept too; yet cried, "Go on, go on!" So then I got to Master Blower, and the sleeping watchman, and my getting into the house, and going from room to room, and hearing him yawn,—which made her laugh; though she cried again when she heard of his praying, and of his sufferings that fearful night and many days after. At the end of all, she got up, put her arms about my neck, and kissed me. "Cherry," says she, "you're an excellent creature!"—Just then, a great bell began to ring—"That's the prayer-bell!" says she, "we will return to the hall, my dear."

So we returned to the hall, much more at our ease together than when we left it. And there, standing in a row, were half a dozen men and women servants, and the table had candles and a large Bible on it. Master Blower read, and then prayed: had I not been so tired, I could have

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wished him to go on all night! Then we dispersed to our several chambers; and I had so much to think about that it seemed as though I should never get to sleep: however, I did at last.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE SQUIRE'S GARDEN.

BEFORE I went to bed, I peeped out of my window, and saw the full moon shining over the broad gravel walks and fish-ponds; and I thought how much I should like to go round the garden before breakfast. However, when I woke in the morning, I feared I had been over-sleeping myself, so dressed in a great hurry, and went down-stairs. There I found two maids flooding the great hall with pails of water, and they told me we were to breakfast in the green parlour, but not for an hour yet. So I strayed out into the garden, where were still a good many flowers, though the season was so late, backed by

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evergreen hedges, and rows of tall trees that were turning yellow and scarlet; and it seemed to me just like the Garden of Eden.

So I went on and on, thinking it mighty pleasant, and wondering what might be the names of some of the flowers; and at length I came to a bowling-green, of wonderful fine turf, between high horn-beam hedges, and having a sun-dial at one end, and a little brick summer-house faced with stone at the other. Into the summer-house I went; and there, with all his books and papers about him, sat Master Blower, writing.

"Ah, Cherry!" says he, holding out his hand, "so you've found out my snuggery! Have they sent you to summon me to breakfast?"

"No, sir," said I; "I did not know you were here." And turned away.

"Stop a minute," says he, hastily putting up his papers, "and we will take a turn together round this wonderful garden. The garden of your *dream*, Cherry."

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I said how very odd it was I should have dreamed about it, — the garden of my dream being so exactly like the reality.

"Why, you simple girl," says he, laughing; "because I must have described it to you before, though you and I had forgotten it!"

I felt quite sure in my own mind that he had not.

"Well," says he, setting out with me along the bowling-green, "what's the news, Cherry? The plague, you say, is abating, but not gone. Have you seen or heard anything of my poor people?"

I said yes. Mistress Peach had come to me on my sending for her the evening before I left, and had told me how things were going on.

"And how *are* they going on?" said he.

"Well, sir, it would be a poor compliment to you, if they were going on as well in your absence as in your presence."

"That's true," says he, looking grave; "but, for particulars."

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"Many persons in trouble of one kind or another knock at your door; and when they find they cannot see you, go away in tears."

"Poor souls!" said he, much moved, "I will return to them shortly. I think I am almost well enough now, Cherry. They think I am neglecting them?"

"No, sir," I said, "they are very sorry you need recruiting; but they are sorry for themselves, too."

"It's a very nice point," says he, musingly, "when we ought to lie by. I believe, had I not left town when I did, I might have been dead now — and yet, perhaps, I was like a soldier deserting his post."

I said, "No, sir, you were liker to a soldier carried off the battle-field to the hospital."

"Thank you, Cherry," says he, taking my hand and drawing it under his arm. We had now reached the end of the bowling-green; but instead of turning into the garden we continued walking up and down.

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"And what else?" says he. "Come, let me hear all."

"Well, sir," said I, "there's not much more to tell—"

"Something, though, I can see!" said he. "Come, out with it, Cherry!"

"Sir," said I, "it's of no use for us to trouble and vex ourselves about what wicked people will say of us in mere wantonness."

"Sometimes, though, we may hear the truth from an enemy," says he. "And what do wicked, wanton people say of me?"

"Why, sir,—some very evil-minded, malapert person hath writ on your church door, 'A pulpit to let!'"

"The rascal!" said he, hastily, and colouring very red. "Why now, did I not keep on, Sabbaths and week-days, till the plague-swellings were actually in my throat, though my congregation often consisted of only two or three old women? Is not this enough to provoke a man, Cherry?"

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I said, "Yes, sir,—only there's no use in being provoked."

"None, none," says he, much perturbed,—"God forgive me for it!—I can hardly have patience, though, with them."

I said, "Dear sir, you must have nothing *but* patience with them."

"You are right, you are right," says he, cooling, but still much moved. "Ill or well, I must go back to them forthwith . . . the fact is, there is a matter I would gladly have settled here, a little at my leisure.—But, duty before all! So, I'll go back, Cherry, to mine."

I smiled a little as I said, "Somebody has been doing duty for you, the last week or ten days, sir."

"Who?" cried he.

I said, "An Independent minister."

A complex kind of expression crossed his face; for a moment he looked pained and provoked, and then burst out a-laughing.

"God bless the worthy fellow!" cries he; "I'll

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do him a good turn if I can, the first time he'll let me! 'The good Lord accept every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, even though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary!'—Well, Cherry, I must go! and that forthwith,—I would fain have tarried here while your visit lasted."

I looked quite blank at the idea of being left behind, and said, "Must I, then, stay?"

"Why," cried he, "what is to prevent you? Your visit is not to *me*, Cherry!"

I said, "Oh, sir, but . . ." and stopped, for I did not know whether it were right to say I should feel so lonely without him. But the tears came into my eyes.

"I hope," says he, in his kindest way, "you will stay and have a very pleasant visit."

I said, "It won't,—it can't be pleasant now."

"Cherry," he said, yet more affectionately, "we shall soon meet again . . . you shake your head.—Well, our lives are not in our own

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keeping, certainly, and may be called in the next minute, here as well as in London. And I should not like to die away from my post. But, Cherry, since you are inexpressibly dear to me, and I think I am, in a less degree, dear to you, why, when we meet next, should we ever part again? —Nay, hear me, Cherry! for I have long meant to say this, though not quite so soon . . . I thought it would seem so abrupt; I wanted to bring you to it by degrees, lest I should get an answer I did not like. For, indeed, Cherry, I know how much too old I am for you, how thoroughly unworthy of you."

I could not stand this, and cried, "Oh, how *can* you say such things, sir? Unworthy of *me*, indeed! when any woman—"

Might be proud to have you, was my thought, but I did not say it.

"Cherry," says he, "there was never—." And just at that moment a man shouted, "High!" at the top of his voice, and then, "Breakfast!"

"We're keeping them waiting," said I, slipping

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my hand from his arm, "and you've left your papers all blowing about in the summer-house." And so, ran off to the house.

Fain would I not have gone straight to breakfast, but there was no help for it; and the Squire kept loading my plate, and yet saying I ate nothing. He and his lady were wondrous sorry to hear Master Blower say he must return to town the next day; and looked rather askance at me for having brought down any tidings that should summon him thither. After breakfast, however, he took his brother aside to explain to him how needful was his return to his parish; and Mistress Blower, bringing forth an immense quantity of patchwork of very intricate contrivance, said, "Now, you and I will do a good morning's work!"—and told me it was a fancy of hers to furnish a little bed-chamber with patchery, lined with pink, and fringed with white. However, Master Blower put a check to all this, as far as my help went, by coming in and saying, that as this was to be his last day

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in the country, he wanted to take a long walk with me, and show me the finest view in the county. Mistress Blower made one or two objections, which he summarily overruled; so, in a very few minutes, off we were walking together. At first, without any reference to what had been said before breakfast, he took me round the village-green, and into the church and churchyard; and made me look over the parsonage gate. I said, "Dear me, if I were you, sir, how much sooner I would be parson here than in Whitechapel!"

"Would you?" cries he. "Oh, but this is a very poor living!"

I said, "I did not know you cared much for money."

"Well," he said, "not to spend on myself, but as a means of usefulness. And, oh, Cherry! there is so much wretchedness in London, that one cannot, after all, relieve!—I'll tell you what I do," continues he, turning down a green lane with me; "as a general rule I give away half.

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That was Zaccheus' measure, you know. But, as a single man, I have found the other half a great deal too much for me, so I give away all I can of it in casualties . . . just to please myself, as it were. But I don't consider this sub-division imperative; therefore, when you and I commence housekeeping together, which I hope will be in a *very* little while, we will spend the full half. Will that suffice you?"

"No indeed, sir," said I; "I shall be very sorry indeed if I add to your expenses so much as that. I would rather give the poor another mouthful than deprive them of one; and as I shall only cost you just what I eat and wear, I hope it won't make much difference."

"You're a comical girl," says he. "But, Cherry, I'm sorry to say, that rambling old house of mine is now so completely out of repair, as to be unfit for a lady's occupation. We must paint it and point it, and mend the roof."

"Well, but," said I, "my father has left me six hundred pounds, which will do all that very well."

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"Six hundred pounds!" says he, opening his eyes very wide, and then laughing. "Why, you've a fortune, Cherry! How could the dear, good man have saved it? I thought his business seemed quite dwindled away."

"He had some money with my mother, sir," said I. "And an uncle left him a legacy. Besides this money, which Master Benskin and Master Braidfoot pay interest for, the house is mine for a long term; and Mark means to buy the business; so that I hope I shall not be very expensive to you."

"Well," says he, "it will be for after-consideration whether we repair the parsonage at once or not. All shall be as you wish it, Cherry." And then we went on talking of this and that till we came to a seat under a tree; and there we sat and talked all the rest of the morning, for we did not care much for going on to see the prospect.

After dinner, it became Master Blower's object to persuade me to name a very early day indeed

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—even that day week; and, though I could hardly endure to think of so sudden a change, and thought it would seem so strange and so unwomanly to everybody, yet the main thing that wrought upon me was what I kept to myself; namely, the danger he was going to incur in returning to his duties before the infection was over. And I thought how I should reproach myself if he fell ill, and died for want of my nursing. But then, again, it would seem so outrageous to the Squire and his lady. . . . Not at all, he said, they knew all about his wanting to marry me before ever they sent for me, and the Squire's lady had at first been very cool about it; but before we had parted at night, I had quite won her over; and she said to him when the door closed upon me, "Well, Nat, you may marry that girl as soon as you like."

I could hardly help laughing—what was I to do? I said, oh, very well, I supposed they must all have their own way,—I would try to be not very miserable about it. So, when we went

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in to supper, Master Blower made no secret of what we had been talking about; and Mistress Blower kissed me, and so did the Squire, and we had a wonderful pleasant supper. When Master Blower was taking leave of me, he asked me if I had any message to send home. It then struck me I must send word to Mark and Dolly how soon my condition was going to be changed,—but, what could I say?—I had scarce written a letter in my life; least of all to Mark; and could not for the life of me think of any way of telling him the news, sufficiently round-about to prevent its seeming abrupt after all. So, thought I, least said, soonest mended: and, sitting down to pen, ink, and paper, I wrote, in my smallest, neatest hand,—

"Dear Mark,

"I'm going to be Mistress Blower."

And sealed it up and directed it. Master Blower said, "Short, if not sweet!" and promised it should be faithfully delivered.

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When he was gone, the patchwork was put away, and the wedding-dresses were discussed. Dear Mistress Blower was as kind as a mother to me, though her husband was only five years older than mine. Indeed, she and the Squire looked upon me quite as a girl, though I told them over and over again I was not. Though they called each other father and mother, they had never had but one child, which died at three years old; but I suppose it was always in their thoughts.

What a happy week that was!—though Master Blower was away. On the whole, his absence was a good thing: it gave me time to steady a little, and feel that it was not a dream that I was going to live always within the sound of his dear voice. And, as there was much sewing to do, I had plenty of time to think of it. Mistress Blower gave me my wedding-clothes,—we had post-horses to the old coach, and went to buy them at the county town. The gown was white silk; the hat trimmed with a wreath of very

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little pink roses round the crown; and I had a cherry-colour habit for travelling. Master Blower said he did not deserve such a pretty bride,—but that was his kind way of speaking. I only wish I were better worth his having!

—We went away from the church door,—as happy a bridegroom and bride as ever rode a pillion. When we had got out of everybody's sight, my husband said, "How are you getting on, Mistress Blower?" I said, "I am smiling so that I am quite glad there's nobody to see me." "May the rest of your life be all smiles and no tears, Cherry," says he,—"with God's blessing, it shall be so if I can make it so!" "Ah!" said I, "I'm content to take the rough and the smooth together, since I shall henceforth share them with you, sir." "Dearest Cherry," says he, "you really must leave off calling me *sir!*" "I don't know that I can, sir," said I, "but I'll try."

Though the journey was delightsome, yet towards the latter end of it every mile of the road became less and less pleasant, till at length we got

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into the tide of people, on horse and on foot, setting in towards London. Then, how strange it seemed to me that I was not going back to the bridge! where I had lived all the days of my life till within the last week! I began to tremble a little; and the idea of the great old roomy, gloomy house in Whitechapel, with no bright, sparkling water to look out upon, became rather oppressive to me, till I thought how Master Blower's continual presence would light it up. The streets now becoming thronged, he pressed my arm tighter to him and bade me hold on close; and I felt he was all the world to me, be the house what it would. But when we reached it, what a difference! The whole front had had a fresh coat of paint, which made it wondrous lightsome and cheerful, the doorstep was fresh whitened, the door fresh varnished, the knocker fresh polished, and Mistress Peach standing on the step with a new cap plaited close round her sweet, pleasant face, and dressed in a new grass-green gown. I could not help kissing her

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as I ran in; she said, "God bless you, mistress!" with hearty cordiality, and followed me from room to room. Everything had been cleaned up, and she told me, laughing, that though she had had plenty of helps, it had been the hardest week's work she had ever had in her life. The old green bed-furniture had given place to new white dimity; there was a lady's pincushion on the toilette, with "May you be happy!" in minikin pins; and a beau-pot of flowers on the window seat. "All that is Mistress Violet's doing," said Dorcas; "she has not left the house half an hour, I assure you, and her needle went in and out as fast as could be when she was finishing the last muslin blind. Oh, she has been very busy, has Mistress Violet! 'Twas she set out the supper-table with the flowers, and sweetmeats, and pound-cake."

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE BURNING CITY.

NEXT day, the holiday of life was over, its duties re-commenced. Master Blower had an accumulation of business to attend to, and I had plenty to do about the house. Before the end of the week, I was immersed in cares that were pleasures to me, inasmuch as they lightened his own. But I could not resist paying a visit to the bridge, and spending an hour in the dear old house, and another, afterwards, with Violet. She and Mark came to sup with us. I found they were not going to marry till six months were out, which was full quick, after all; but I was

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thankful they would wait so long. A change seemed coming over Mark; he was steady, composed, attentive to business, and far pleasanter, whether lively or sad, than in his earlier days. As to Violet, she was infinitely softened, and the old spirit of coquetry seemed quite to have burned out. We did not see them often, but Master Blower always received them kindly, and they seemed to consider it a privilege as well as a pleasure to come to us.

Thus, the winter wore on; the plague was stayed; and though it was common to meet in the streets men in their nightcaps, limping, or with their throats bound up, no one thought of getting out of their way, for the infection had spent itself. And persons that were strangers to each other might be heard exchanging congratulations on the improved state of things, now that houses and shops were re-opening, the weeds beginning to disappear from the thoroughfares, and men no longer walked along the middle of the streets, but on the foot pavements.

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My dear husband endeavoured to impress the hearts and minds of his people, in season and out of season, with a sense of the mercy that had preserved them; but, I am sorry to say, with very little permanent effect. True it is, at first the ground was broken up, and the clods were soft, and the good seed that was cast in seemed likely to fructify, but alas, the hot sun of worldly temptation soon hardened the ground and burnt the seed up, and people that had almost miraculously escaped the general judgment, seemed little better than they were before. This depressed my dear husband very much; but, instead of relaxing his efforts, he only doubled them; and he said I strengthened his hands.

There was also a great deal of distress, owing to the general stagnation of trade, and the vast numbers of people thrown out of employ. So that, though we did all we could, it was heart-rending to witness the misery in some of the lower districts of our parish. We pinched ourselves to help them, voluntarily giving up such

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and such things at our table; and this with such cheerfulness that I really believe our self-privations gave us more actual enjoyment than if we had ate the fat and drank the sweet to our hearts' desire. And once or twice it remarkably happened that when we had a little exceeded in this way, and had supplied thereby the needs of a more than ordinary number, a great hamper would arrive from Mistress Blower, full of game, poultry, eggs, butter, brawn, hams, tongues, and everything that was good. Often we talked over that sweet place the hampers came from; and it seemed to me that my husband more and more inclined towards the country; especially as his throat had never quite recovered the effects of the plague, and he found he could not make himself heard throughout the remoter parts of his large church without difficulty. Quite at the end of the summer, the old incumbent of Bucklands parsonage died; and as the living was in the Squire's gift, and he had some notion his brother would like it, he wrote to offer it to him. My

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husband asked my mind about it; I said I should like it of all things, if he could be content with so small and quiet a field of action. He said, yes, the time had been when it had been otherwise with him, the harder the work the greater the pleasure, especially as carrying some sense of glory in the victory over it; but it was not so with him now: he could be content with trying to do good on a small scale; especially as he had not been quite so successful on the larger field of action as he had hoped and expected.

"Could I preach like Apollos," continued he, "to what good to the half of my congregation, who cannot catch one word in ten? So that, in fact, I preach to a small congregation already. And I've no mind to receive the pay without doing the work. There's no fear, Cherry, of my not making myself audible in Bucklands church! —Besides, do you know I fancy I have a little domestic mission there. My dear, good brother, who has dozed under Doctor Bray for so many years, has languished under a spiritual dearth.

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He is now getting in years, and I think I may do something for him—you know he told you he thought my sermons were *the real thing.*"

"He said," replied I, "that you not only hit the right nail on the head, but hammered it well in."

After some further talk, which only went to prove how completely we were of a mind on the matter, the letters were written and sent—to accept the one living and resign the other. That was on the second of September. The same night broke out that dreadful fire which lasted three days and three nights, and destroyed fifteen of the twenty-six city wards, including four hundred streets and lanes, and thirteen thousand houses. Oh, what a dreadful calamity! We were in bed, a little after ten, when shrieks and cries of "Fire!" awoke us; and my dear husband put his head forth of the window and asked where it was. A man running along answered, "On or at the foot of London Bridge!" Then our hearts failed us for Violet and Mark, and all

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our old friends; and we dressed and went forth, for I could not be stayed from accompanying Master Blower. But before we could reach the bridge foot, we found access to it cut off, both by reason of the crowd and of the flames: the only comfort was, that the fire kept off the bridge. There was so much tumult and pressure that we could only keep on the skirts of the crowd, where we hung about without doing any good for some hours.

The next morning, we were in hope of hearing the fire had been got under; instead of which, the whole Bankside was wrapped in flames, and all the houses from the bridge foot, and all Thames Street, were lying in ashes. The people seemed all at pause, gazing on, without stirring hand or foot, and those that were personal sufferers were venting their grief in cries and lamentations. But we could not find that any life had yet been lost; and the fire kept off the bridge.

When I went home at dusk, it was to pray for

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the poor sufferers, and then to muse how far the calamity might extend. Supper was on table, but I had no mind to eat; which was all the better, as my husband presently brought in a poor weeping family, who had lost everything, and had not touched a morsel all day. We gave them a good meal, and shelter for the night. They slept, but we could not. There was no need of candles all that night, which was as light as day for ten miles round. The fire was now spreading all along the south part of the city, leaping from house to house, and street to street, for the very air seemed ignited; showers of sparks and ashes were falling in every direction, and the pavement was growing almost too hot to tread upon. My husband kept bringing in new refugees as long as our house would hold them, and I was too busy caring for them to have leisure to go forth, even had it been safe; but each new comer brought fresh tidings of the desolation, which was now extending to churches, public monuments, hospitals, companies' halls, as

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though it would carry all before it. We now began to be in some alarm for ourselves; and to consider what we should do if it came our way; and now we experienced the convenience of having but little treasure that moth, rust, or fire could injure, for when Master Blower had made up a small packet of papers and ready money that we could readily carry about us, there was nothing left for the destroyer to consume but our poor furniture, and the house over our heads. Very opportunely, at this time, came to our door a Berkshire countryman, with one of the good Squire's hampers full of eatables. I never saw a poor fellow look so scared! He got a good view of the calamity from a distance, and then set his face homewards in as great a hurry as if the flames were in chase of him. The streets were now full of carts loaded with moveables, which their owners were conveying out of town; giving way to the calamity rather than seeking to arrest it, which, indeed, it was now vain to attempt; though I think something might have been done

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at first. St. Paul's was now in a blaze; the great stones exploding with intense heat, and the melted lead running along the gutters. This night, also, we got scarce any rest.

The next morning, while I was overlooking my stores, and considering how I should best husband them for my poor inmates, in comes Mark, his face blackened, his hair full of ashes, his clothes singed in many places, and his shoes nearly burnt off his feet.

"Thank God, you are safe, then!" cries he, catching hold of both my hands. "The sky looked so fiery in this quarter during the night, that Violet and I were in dreadful fear for you, and I started at daybreak, and came here by making a great round, to see how it fared with you. And Violet bids me say that she has not forgotten your father's and mother's kindness to her father and mother when they were burned out of house and home, nor how she and you were put together in the same cradle; and it would make her and me, dear Cherry, unspeak-

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ably happy to receive you and Master Blower under the very same roof, should you be burnt out of your own."

I said, "Dear Mark, that is so like you and Violet! Just the kindness I should have expected! Believe me, we shall thankfully accept it, if there be need. But at present the fire is all about us, yet comes not to us. We have made up our little parcel of treasures (a little one, indeed, Mark!) and are ready to start at a minute's notice, trusting to a good God to spare our lives. This old house, if it once catches, will burn like tinder; meanwhile, come and see how many it holds."

So I led him from room to room, and showed him mothers nursing their infants, children eating bread and milk, and old people still sleeping heavily. He was greatly interested and impressed. "What a good soul you are!" said he; "I can give you no notion of the scenes of misery on the outskirts through which I passed on my way here. People huddled in tents, or

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lying under hedges, or on heaps of litter and broken furniture, without a morsel of bread or a cup of milk, yet none begging! . . . I saw a few bread-carts and milk-people coming up to them as I passed along, but many had no money, not even a penny, to buy a breakfast. I had filled my purse, Cherry, with all that was in the till, before I set out; but you see there's not much in it now—"

And he pulled out an empty purse, with a smile that showed he was well pleased with the way its contents had gone. Then we shook hands heartily, and parted.

To the loud crackling of flames and crash of falling buildings, was now added the blowing up of houses with gunpowder, which, indeed, made the neighbourhood of them very dangerous to bystanders, but checked the progress of the fire. However, nothing effectual could have been done, had it not pleased Almighty God to stay His judgment by abating the high wind, which fell all at once; whereby the flames ceased to

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spread, though the glowing ruins continued to burn.

The crisis being now past, we ceased to be in apprehension for ourselves, and devoted all our attention to the poor bereft people under our care. Some of these were fetched away by their country friends; sooner or later all dispersed; and then we went out into the fields adjoining the city, to afford what little help we could. But oh, the desolation! To attempt to assuage that accumulation of destitution by our trivial means seemed like essaying to subdue the fire with a cup of water: yet we know that every little helps; and that even a cup of water, to the thirsty man who drinks it, quenches not his thirst the less, that thousands beside are parched with drought. And thus, by analogy, concerning the general amount of human suffering surrounding us at all times, which the wife of a Whitechapel parson is perhaps as well qualified to speak of as any one else—we need not be discouraged from aiding any, because we cannot

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succour all; since the relief afforded is as grateful to him who has it, as though *all* were relieved, which it is not God's will that any should have power to accomplish.

By the end of the month this terrible calamity was over-past; at least, as far as we had anything to do with it, though we continued to give shelter to poor, ruined householders, as long as the parsonage was our own. The gentleman who succeeded my dear husband seemed a benevolent sort of man, a little pompous, maybe, but tenderly disposed towards the poor.

And now, everything being settled, we sold some of our old furniture, and sent down the rest, with Mistress Peach, by the waggon. And my dear husband and I entered Bucklands exactly as we had left it, and on the very same horse; I in my cherry-colour habit, that was as fresh as on my wedding-day. And here we have been ever since; and he calls me his right hand, and says my attention to all his secular affairs eaves his mind at liberty to pursue his duties and

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studies without distraction—and that I understand the poor even better than he does—and that I am his best counsellor, his dearest friend, his pleasantest companion, his darling Cherry!—Yes, he calls me, and I believe he thinks me, all this: and as for *my* being happy in *him* . . . I should think so, indeed!

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